Government of **Western Australia**
Department for **Child Protection**
and **Family Support**

Survey on Homelessness Service Provision
Executive Summary Report

Department for Child Protection and Family Support

1. Background

In Western Australia, the Department for Child Protection and Family Support (the Department) is the lead agency responsible for the coordination of funding for homelessness services through the National Affordable Housing Agreement (NAHA) and the National Partnership Agreement on Homelessness (NPAH).

This summary report shows the findings of the survey on *Homelessness Service Provision* (the survey). The survey was developed to identify areas of focus, gaps in service provision and examples of successful programs and service models in the homelessness sector.

There were 190 survey respondents, 145 were from specialist homelessness services (SHS) with the remainder from the Department's district offices across Western Australia. The SHS respondents represented positions from all levels of the organisation including Chief Executive Officers, Program Managers, Service Managers and other service staff.

The survey comprised 31 questions including 12 open-ended questions. Two of the open-ended questions were exclusively directed at SHS Program Managers, Service Managers and other service staff. The open-ended questions offered an opportunity for respondents to provide detailed information about gaps, challenges and improvements in providing service provision.

Purpose

The purpose of the survey was to identify areas of focus and provide examples of successful programs and service models in the homelessness sector. The responses are being utilised to inform areas of discussion at homelessness forums being held in the second half of 2016 in both metropolitan Perth and regional areas, and in the development of a Western Australian strategic plan for homelessness.

The purpose of this summary report is to provide a thematic analysis. The report does not include data or percentage breakdowns for responses to the questions.

2. Findings

Drivers for demand

SHS Managers and staff were asked to describe the main drivers for the demand of their services. Housing issues and family and domestic violence were the most frequently described main drivers of demand with more than half of responses referring to one of these, followed by complexity of cases (i.e. alcohol and drug dependence and mental health). Housing issues includes lack of affordable and/or suitable accommodation options and lack of crisis accommodation.

Other key themes driving demand for services were family breakdown and hardship comprising financial and economic issues such as inability to secure employment, low income or loss of income.

Sample responses provided are as follows:

> *'The drivers for our homeless services remain complex and include acute and untreated mental illness, alcohol and other drug use, domestic and family violence, poverty, chaotic lifestyles, transience, unresolved childhood trauma, etc.'*

> *'Individuals, families and children as well as significant others linked to those mentioned who are impacted upon due to substance misuse, family and domestic violence as well as sexual assault and sexual abuse of women and children within the family, kinship unit and co-morbid mental health issues.'*

Suggested changes to service models

The question seeking suggestion on changes to their service models was another question exclusively for SHS Managers and staff.

When asked what one change to the service model would be considered if an opportunity arises, respondents provided the following suggestions:

- Better coordination through partnerships and collaborations between:
    - services; and
    - services and government departments.

- Better outcomes through:
    - moving away from 'one size fits all' approach to flexible service models;
    - longer periods of support for clients;
    - increasing resources for service delivery through additional funding and staffing; and
    - increasing accessibility for clients in terms of longer hours of operation.

Sample responses provided are as follows:

> *'Longer support periods. We have found that a large number of clients have very complex needs and can require longer periods of support to get to a stage where they feel safe enough to deal with their trauma.'*

> *'Better coordination between services - consider empowering (and obliging) service providers to work collaboratively at a regional level around resource priorities and who is going to deliver what. Reduce silos and artificial barriers between agencies and specialist services that work to address homelessness (mental health, AOD, housing, health, disabilities, job service providers) and promote an integrated approach to service provision.'*

Recent impacts on service delivery

Respondents were asked to identify factors impacting their service provision, excluding funding related issues and shortage in supply of affordable housing.

Both the SHS and Department staff cited housing-related issues such as availability of services that provide crisis, medium-long term accommodation and supported accommodation and lack of housing options as their top responses. Other impacts cited by both SHS and Department staff included increase in demand for service, increase in family and domestic violence cases, access and retention of suitably qualified staff and funding cutbacks of relevant non-SHS programs.

SHS staff also identified:

- clients presenting with complex issues; and
- lack of coordination and collaboration of resources.

Sample responses provided are as follows:

> *'Complex underlying social issues (eg housing, health, poverty, social isolation, cultural issues, mental health, drug & alcohol, employment education and training etc), high cost of living vs availability of affordable accommodation, disengagement of clients with mainstream services.'*

> *'Clients appear to be presenting with more complex issues.   Demand seems to be increasing.'*

> *'Gaining and maintaining experienced and suitably qualified staff to fulfil the roles in a remote community.'*

Current gaps in availability of Services or Programs

When asked to describe what services or programs were not available in their region, the most frequently cited gaps by SHS respondents were:

- housing-related issues including:
    - lack of accommodation across all target groups;
    - lack of transitional housing from medium term to independent housing;
    - supported accommodation options for men with children;
    - accommodation for women who are not experiencing family and domestic violence; and
    - Foyer like youth accommodation
- support services;
- services for people with complex issues;
- sobering up centres; and

- drop in centres.

The lack of crisis and transitional accommodation options was not restricted to any region.

Sample responses provided are as follows:

> *'Short term accommodation. Crisis accommodation for men and women. Emergency housing Transitional housing that aims to build capacity to move into public or private rental. Private tenancy support.'*

> *'more street to home and drop in services for street present .'*

Department staff who responded to this question also cited lack of accommodation as their top response followed by a shortage of appropriate support services and a lack of an integrated approach towards service provision.

Sample responses provided are as follows:

> *'Emergency and short term homelessness centres. Supported accommodation (where housing authority holds the tenancy but a service provides case management to assist in developing appropriate skills for independent living and transition to private sector housing/ jobs/ etc.'*

> *'There is a dearth of appropriate housing provision for homeless women who do not meet the criteria for domestic violence housing support. '*

Family and Domestic Violence Sector Reform and Standardised Assessment Framework

The survey included a question asking participants whether they were familiar with the recent reforms to family and domestic violence services in the metropolitan area, which aimed at enhancing the service system through coordinated and integrated responses with lead agencies providing a coordination and facilitation role.

The majority of the respondents were familiar with the reforms and believed similar reforms would provide some level of improvement if implemented in non-family and domestic violence SHS. Similarly, the majority of respondents believed that a standardised assessment framework to match services with client needs would improve homelessness services in Western Australia.

Strategies to improve outcomes for Aboriginal people

Respondents were asked to describe the best strategies that they were aware of, that improved accessibility and engagement with Aboriginal individuals and/or families.

Both SHS and Department staff respondents cited the following strategies:

- service coordination and forging strong working partnerships with local Aboriginal organisations and community groups;
- Aboriginal cultural awareness training and mentoring;
- employment of Aboriginal staff;

- include and engage extended family of the client in important meetings and for important decision making; and
- establish community advisory groups with local Elders and Aboriginal organisations to ensure culturally relevant service development and delivery.

In addition, SHS participants provided the following responses, regarding service delivery:

- knowledge and understanding of Aboriginal culture and community structures;
- providing sufficient time for initial engagement with client;
- service provision in non-office settings;
- knowledge of available support services, including Aboriginal services; and
- trained and qualified staff to work with Aboriginal people.

Sample responses provided are as follows:

'Having Aboriginal staff particularly in senior positions if possible. Getting to know the client and where they are from and hear stories about their families so you can be more understanding about the bigger picture behind why they have ended up in our service and also try to take a more empathetic and understanding approach.'

'Working with the family not just the individual. Transparency and clear goals. Use of Aboriginal staff. Availability and respectful practice.'

When asked to consider type of programs that deliver good outcomes for Aboriginal individuals and/or families, responses received were broad strategies similar to the strategies to improve accessibility and engagement with Aboriginal individuals and/or families, as noted above, rather than specific programs. These strategies included:

- culturally responsive service delivery model;
- holistic programs that are flexible and provides a range of services; and
- programs partnered with/driven by Aboriginal agencies.

Sample responses provided are as follows:

'Programs that involve Aboriginal people in design and delivery, but acknowledge the privacy concerns of individuals accessing programs.'

'Programs that are not specific to one issue - programs work best for Aboriginal individuals and families if they offer a broad range of services under the one roof.'

'Intensive case management Flexible service delivery Services that focus on prevention of homelessness such as a home maker .- home visiting service that can support Aboriginal people to secure and maintain a tenancy.'

Individual Programs

Respondents from SHS and the Department were asked to indicate their level of involvement with a number of specific programs, and provide strategies to improve service provision.

Tenancy/Housing Support Worker and Homelessness Accommodation Support Worker Programs

When asked to describe one improvement in the program, there were similar responses from both SHS and Department staff with the top three improvements being service delivery, housing and an integrated response.

Suggestions for improvements included:

- increasing the length of support period;
- flexible service delivery;
- increasing the supply of affordable housing;
- having alternative options of housing, including size and type; and
- more collaboration between specialist homelessness services and other service providers to widen the suite of services available to clients in areas where specialist services may not be directly provided.

Sample responses provided are as follows:

> *'Alternative housing options need to be available for this to be a success. Often difficult to secure housing'*

> *'Stronger integration with other agencies providing specialist wrap around services'*

Support for Children in Homeless Families Program

When asked to suggest one change to the program, SHS and Department staff focused on improving service delivery through longer support periods and children being case managed through inclusion of child inclusive practices and therapeutic components.

A sample response provided is as follows:

> *'Flexibility for longer support periods in recognition of the significant impact that homelessness has on children to increase the chances to avoiding intergenerational homelessness.'*

Crisis and Transitional Accommodation Programs

In this question, participants were asked to consider strategies or partnerships to assist homeless people into long term accommodation. There were similar responses from both SHS and Department staff. Respondents provided the following strategies:

- more medium and long term affordable housing options needed to support exits from crisis services;
- partnerships/collaborations with the private sector to facilitate transition from supported accommodation into private rentals;
- partnerships/collaborations between specialist homelessness services and/or private/public sector in increasing housing options; and
- Investments to increase housing stock by the government and; private and community housing organisation partnerships in developing affordable housing.

In addition, SHS indicated independent living skills training as a strategy required for acquiring and maintaining a stable living situation.

Sample responses provided are as follows:

> *'Primarily we (the broader sector and government) need to address the shortfall in the supply of affordable housing – increase the construction of social housing and improve access to the private rental market (Private Rental Access Schemes). We need to ensure families and individuals have exit points from transitional/supportive programs – these individuals will be more likely to succeed in long term accommodation having been supported to develop living skills.'*

> *'Better relationships and increased knowledge of family structure, to also collaborate with agencies on the ground that do have information that they may not get from families because of diminishing relationships'*

Youth Accommodation and Support Services

Diverting young people from becoming homeless

When asked what could be done to divert young people from becoming homeless, SHS and Department staff cited early intervention programs which addressed factors such as family conflict, mental health issues, unemployment and alcohol and drug issues, and strategies for building on family relationships and community connections.

More specifically, participants referred to school-based intervention programs, the Department of Social Services' *Reconnect*[1] program and independent living skills training required for acquiring and maintaining a stable living situation. Participants referred to services focusing on youth presenting with complex issues and outreach based services.

Respondents considered housing intervention as a diversionary strategy, with both SHS and Department staff referring to the following:

- short term accommodation (especially in regional areas);
- Foyer-like accommodation;
- supported accommodation;
- Housing First approach; and
- flexible accommodation options.

Sample responses provided are as follows:

> *'1.Improving family relationships 2.Upskilling and educating young people to find and maintain alternative accommodation options 3. Providing or sourcing support for other factors contributing to potential homelessness (i.e. mental health/drug and alcohol issues)'*

> *'A focus on support for families, and family reunification, as well as very early intervention. Stronger support and resources provided to schools working with vulnerable children.'*

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[1] *Reconnect* is community-based early intervention program for young people who are homeless or at risk of homelessness.

Preventing young people from entrenched homelessness

For the question on preventing young people from becoming entrenched in homelessness, responses provided by both SHS and Department staff were similar with respondents identifying the following strategies:

- housing (transitional and long term);
- support services; and
- engagement in education, training or work for independent living.

Sample responses provided are as follows:

> *'providing them access to a transitional housing program to provide them first tenancy opportunity, provide them with all skills required to live independently   and is they access education, work or training.'*

> *'Each individual needs to be provided with the skills and tools to address their own housing issue (and the array of additional needs that young person may have [family and domestic violence, AOD, mental health etc]). By being provided with long term stable accommodation, and specialised youth workers to support them with their journey ending the cycle of homelessness may be a real possibility. It is also imperative that on existing any specialised homeless/housing programs there is stable accommodation to transition into and support services available as and when that individual may require support.'*

Other Strategies for improving homelessness service provision

The last question of the survey asked participants for any additional comments to improve the provision of homelessness services.

The top four responses for both SHS and Department staff were similar and were recurring through the responses in previous sections. These were:

- housing strategies including Housing First type model and building affordable housing and/or accommodation options;
- program-related improvements relating to flexibility in service delivery, client-centered approaches and co-location of services;
- committed ongoing funding; and
- collaboration between Government and service providers, including non-SHS, with adequate resourcing.

3. Summary

The questions in the survey focused on the main drivers of demand, changes to service models and service gaps. Recurrent themes emerged from the survey. These are:

- a shortage of suitable housing;
- housing affordability;
- complexity of client needs including drug and alcohol dependence and mental health issues; and
- limited opportunities to move people through the homelessness service system.

The survey also provided opportunities for respondents to refer to strategies on improving programs, preventing homelessness and breaking the cycle of homelessness. In analysing their responses, trends emerged highlighting a focus on improving the homelessness service system, strengthening networks and service integration through:

- a standardised assessment framework to improve SHS;
- flexible service delivery with longer support periods;
- collaborations between SHS and/or with other service providers; and
- collaboration between SHS and government departments.

Aboriginal people continue to form a disproportionate percentage of the homeless population across Western Australia. In the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare's SHS 2014-15 Report, 40 per cent of clients accessing SHS in Western Australia identified themselves as Aboriginal. Responses from survey participants regarding addressing Aboriginal homelessness, focussed on provision of holistic culturally appropriate programs and services partnered or driven by Aboriginal agencies.

Homelessness remains a key priority area for the Department and high on the strategic agenda. A comprehensive response to homelessness requires commitment and involvement by not-for-profit community service sector organisations, all levels of government and industry.

The findings from the survey will be utilised in the homelessness forums that will be held in metropolitan Perth and regional Western Australia. At these forums, participants will be identifying their priorities, thereby reflecting local homelessness issues. The information collated from this survey and the forums will lay the foundation for the preparation of future workshops for developing service models for the homelessness sector.