



Australian Government

GOVERNMENT RESPONSE

**To the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Family, Community,
Housing and Youth report:**

Housing the Homeless

Report on the inquiry into homelessness legislation

Foreword

The Australian Government thanks the members of the Committee for the in-depth consideration given to the serious issues facing people experiencing homelessness, and people who are at risk of homelessness.

Being unable to obtain adequate and affordable housing is a major barrier to social inclusion, affecting health, quality of life, and education and employment opportunities that most Australians take for granted.

Unfortunately it is estimated to affect more than 100,000 Australians on any one night and one in three of these people are under 25 years of age.

This is unacceptable, and in 2008, the Australian Government made tackling homelessness a national priority.

Since 2008, the Australian Government has committed nearly \$5 billion in new funding to tackle homelessness – the greatest amount in Australian history. The Government is strongly committed to its White Paper goals, including to halve the rate of homelessness and offer supported accommodation to all those who seek it by 2020.

Significant inroads are also being made through the Government's \$5.6 billion Social Housing Initiative, the largest commitment to social housing by any government in Australia in history and a key component of the Nation-Building Economic Stimulus Plan. This Initiative will see almost 20,000 new social housing homes built. At least half of these will go to people who are homeless or at risk of homelessness.

In addition, repairs and maintenance have been carried out on around 80,000 existing homes, of which 12,000 would have been uninhabitable. This unprecedented investment in housing is a keystone in the Government's commitment to the progressive realisation of the right of all Australians to access to adequate housing.

However, while significant progress has been made since the Australian Government's White Paper: *The Road Home*, the Government is committed to continuing to progress its response to homelessness.

INTRODUCTION

In the Australian Government's White Paper on homelessness, *The Road Home*, the Government outlined its desire to introduce new homelessness legislation to ensure that people who are homeless receive quality services and adequate support.

The Government remains committed to introducing legislation and has welcomed the Committee's recommendations and input.

The Government's intention is to introduce this legislation as soon as possible following consultation on an exposure draft. The new legislation will replace the *Supported Accommodation Assistance Act 1994* (Cth) (SAA Act), which set out important principles and has guided the Commonwealth's response to homelessness in Australia since first legislated in 1985. The SAA Act was primarily a vehicle for providing funding to States and Territories to administer the Supported Accommodation Assistance Program (SAAP). New funding arrangements were introduced in 2009 under the federal financial relations framework, superseding the funding mechanism of the SAA Act.

The new legislation will seek to preserve the best features of the SAA Act (other than its redundant funding provisions). For example, people who are homeless were recognised in the SAA Act as one of the most powerless and marginalised groups in society. The SAA Act made clear the Parliament's view that support should be provided in a way that respects people's dignity as individuals, enhances their self-esteem, is sensitive to their social and economic circumstances and respects their cultural backgrounds and their beliefs.

New legislation provides an opportunity to retain in law the important statements about homelessness, the partnerships, the effort and the strategies that are needed to tackle it, and the treatment and support that vulnerable people deserve. It can also do this in a more contemporary way than the old SAA Act, establishing the relationship between these themes and the Government's commitment to social inclusion for all Australians.

As the Commonwealth does not have express constitutional power in relation to housing or homelessness, the Government has therefore decided to pursue the issue of service quality by working with States and Territories to develop a Homelessness National Quality Framework.

Consultations on the Framework were completed at the end of May 2011 and included workshop sessions with service providers and other stakeholders and individual interviews with people experiencing homelessness. The consultations showed that there is support in the sector for a system that supports services to improve service delivery. The Government intends that the Framework will be the primary strategy for ensuring quality services. The new Select Council on Housing and Homelessness will consider the design of the Framework later in 2012.

The Australian Government broadly agrees with the Committee's recommendations. Some recommendations relate to roles for which the States and Territories are responsible, rather than the Commonwealth. Notwithstanding this, the Australian Government is considering all possible avenues to support people who are homeless or at risk, to complement any legislation that is introduced. The agenda set out in the White Paper demonstrates how important this issue is to the Australian Government.

As has been noted, the Homelessness National Quality Framework will be the key vehicle for the White Paper goal of ensuring quality services. In looking at the potential models, the Australian Government will encourage all jurisdictions to consider an approach that best fosters ongoing improvement, supports the sector to optimise its capacity and effectiveness, and provides opportunities for specialist and mainstream services to actively collaborate in service integration.

The Australian Government remains committed to improving outcomes for people experiencing or at risk of homelessness and its response to the Committee's recommendations is derived from that perspective. Ensuring that people who are experiencing homelessness or at risk receive high quality services and get every chance to move out of homelessness or avoid it altogether is key to the Government's policy agenda in this area.

A central principle of the White Paper strategy is that reducing homelessness is everyone's responsibility. The Government understands that no single support sector can have sufficient impact on the objective of reducing homelessness on its own. As recommended by the Parliamentary Inquiry, the Government will express in the legislation its commitment to maintaining partnerships with the other sectors and draw attention to the value and the importance of effective and cooperative partnerships between all sectors, to make a difference for people who are homeless.

Responses

Recommendation 1

That new homelessness legislation explicitly state that its objectives are to:

- **achieve an overall reduction in homelessness by allowing access to adequate and sustainable housing; and**
- **achieve social inclusion for people experiencing homelessness or at increased risk of homelessness.**

AGREE IN PART

The Government agrees that the objectives recommended by the Committee are important and they reflect the vision of the White Paper.

However, meeting the proposed objectives will require effort on a number of fronts and legislation is only one part of the approach. Achieving these objectives requires the commitment of all governments and working collaboratively with the States and Territories will be critical to achieving success.

As part of its Social Inclusion agenda, the Australian Government is taking a multi-faceted approach to addressing homelessness. The Australian Government has already acted to meet these objectives through a significant injection of funding. Over four years from 2008-09 the Government is providing the largest ever single boost to the supply of social and affordable housing through various housing programs including:

- \$5.6 billion under the Nation Building Economic Stimulus Plan to
 - build over 19,600 homes (at least half of which will go to those who are homeless or at risk of homelessness) from 2008-09 to 2011-12 and
 - repair and upgrade of 80,000 existing social housing dwellings;
- the joint initiative *A Place To Call Home* to build 600 new homes for individuals and families experiencing homelessness, with a \$150 million Commonwealth investment and State and Territory governments providing land, capital and funding for support services; and
- building 35,000 new affordable rental homes under the National Rental Affordability Scheme, with a further 15,000 to be delivered beyond 2015-16.

A central premise of the renewed effort to deal with homelessness is the recognition that homelessness is not just a housing problem, and can have many complex underlying causes. Involving mainstream services in the response to homelessness will be important to meeting the targets.

While the Government agrees with the principle of the objectives and is taking significant action to achieve them, it is constrained in the extent to which it can do this in legislation by the Australian Constitution. It is noted that State and Territory Governments' policies have a strong influence on the availability of affordable and adequate housing and shelter.

Recommendation 2

That the Minister for Housing include a preamble in new homelessness legislation which:

- **establishes its relationship and alignment with the Australian Government’s policy for addressing homelessness as set out in *The Road Home* and implemented through the National Affordable Housing Agreement and associated National Partnerships;**
- **establishes its relationship with housing legislation and policy, including initiatives to increase the supply of affordable housing;**
- **acknowledges the individual, socio-economic and structural causes of homelessness, including explicitly for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples; and**
- **establishes its relationship with the Social Inclusion Agenda and other national reforms that target the structural and individual causes of homelessness.**

AGREE IN PRINCIPLE

The Australian Government agrees with the Committee that any homelessness legislation should establish the context in which it is enacted. Broad language would be favoured to ensure that references to specific mechanisms and frameworks do not date and the context is described in a way that will remain relevant and meaningful.

The SAA Act set the scene for its time in terms of recognising the needs of people who are homeless and declaring the Parliament’s intent that they are effectively supported. New legislation will do the same but with a more contemporary referencing of the complexity and consequences of homelessness and the range of measures needed to address it, including consideration of the particular needs of specific groups. While the Australian Government agrees it is important to acknowledge the various causes and drivers of homelessness, it would seek to have legislation drafted that does not appear, by omission, to leave some groups out or diminish their need.

The legislation will, however, include specific reference to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, in recognition of the particular inequalities that they face. Initiatives to reduce homelessness will be an important step towards closing the gap on the socio-economic and structural causes of disadvantage.

Recommendation 3

That the Minister for Housing include a broad definition of homelessness in new homelessness legislation based on an extended version of the definition in the *Supported Accommodation Assistance Act 1994* (“the SAA Act”). The revised definition of homelessness should be consistent with and complement the cultural definition as used by the Australian Bureau of Statistics, including recognition of primary, secondary and tertiary categories of homelessness.

AGREE

The Australian Government agrees with this approach and will employ a definition that is consistent with the recommendation, and as used in the White Paper. In contrast to many other countries, the Australian Government favours a broad definition to ensure

that policy and response engage with the range of complex causes and manifestations of homelessness that create barriers to social inclusion.

The White Paper looks to strategies that include prevention of homelessness and early intervention. This necessitates a broad definition to guide responses to homelessness that focus support not just for those who are sleeping rough, but also those who are:

- early in the cycle or at risk;
- living in temporary accommodation such as crisis accommodation or staying with friends or relatives; and
- staying in accommodation such as boarding houses or caravan parks, with no secure lease and no private facilities.

Recommendation 4

That new homelessness legislation explicitly states a commitment to reducing homelessness through an integrated and coordinated approach involving partnerships between:

- **all levels of governments and across portfolios; and**
- **governments and the not-for-profit and for-profit sectors.**

AGREE

The Australian Government agrees that homelessness is everyone's responsibility and as such the response to homelessness needs to involve many portfolios in all levels of government, the specialist homelessness sector, peak bodies, mainstream organisations, philanthropic organisations and the corporate sector. The Government agrees that this commitment should be reflected in homelessness legislation.

Through the National Partnership Agreement on Homelessness (NPAH), the Australian Government is working closely with States and Territories. The NPAH sets out a number of targets which all States and Territories signed up to. Some of the targets include that by 2013 there will be:

- a decrease of 7 per cent in the number of Australians who are homeless;
- a decrease of 25 per cent in the number of Australians sleeping rough; and
- a decrease of a third for Indigenous people who are homeless.

The States and Territories have all developed implementation plans that set out the activities they will undertake that will help to meet the targets.

At the Commonwealth level, a Homelessness Delivery Review Board was established to better align and integrate policies and programs across government that impact on homelessness. The Board is made up of senior representatives of many portfolios who have been designated as being accountable for homelessness responses within their agencies.

The Government is committed to working with both the for-profit and not-for-profit sectors to reduce homelessness.

Recommendation 5

That the Minister for Housing examine the full range of options for engaging innovatively with the for-profit sector, as well as the not-for-profit sector, to reduce homelessness.

AGREE

The Australian Government agrees with the Committee that engaging productively with the private sector, as well as the not-for-profit sector, to reduce homelessness is important. On the strength of the White Paper principle that reducing ‘homelessness is everyone’s responsibility’, the Australian Government is keen to engage with the business and community sectors.

There is a lot of good work that occurs independently of government, through the activities of the corporate and business sectors. For example Philanthropy Australia has an Addressing Homelessness Affinity Group which targets its efforts on projects to reduce homelessness. Many businesses also donate goods, services or time to specialist homelessness services.

In terms of the not-for-profit sector, early in 2010 the Prime Minister, Minister Macklin and Senator Ursula Stephens signed a National Compact with a range of foundation signatories from Australia’s ‘third sector’ of community and not-for-profit organisations. This milestone collaboration signalled a formal, shared vision of Government and sector stakeholders working together for a more inclusive Australia and better community outcomes.

Opportunities for the Government to partner with both sectors will continue to be examined by the Australian Government and the Prime Minister’s Council on Homelessness.

Recommendation 6

That the Minister for Housing include in new homelessness legislation a commitment to reducing homelessness by:

- **supporting prevention and early intervention strategies;**
- **providing an adequate supply of appropriate accommodation options for people who are experiencing homelessness; and**
- **providing ongoing services and support, including case management, to ensure transitions into suitable and sustainable housing.**

AGREE IN PRINCIPLE

The White Paper expressed the Australian Government’s commitment to the use of prevention and early intervention strategies as part of a multi-pronged response. Tackling homelessness will require effort across the range of measures identified by the Committee. For some of these measures the focus of effort will come most effectively at the government and business level, and for other measures it will be at the service delivery level. Some strategies will lend themselves to expression in quality standards and others to a lesser extent. However, articulating in the legislation the need for a holistic range of measures, regardless of how they are best implemented, will help to acknowledge the complexity of the challenge and remind successive governments of

the range of different responses that need to be sustained at different stages to make a genuine impact.

Existing legislation already contributes to supporting people to transition into suitable and sustainable housing. Under the social security law, Commonwealth Rent Assistance is available for some people to help with the cost of renting in the private rental market. Commonwealth Rent Assistance is payable to an individual or family that is receiving an income support payment (such as Newstart, Youth Allowance, Disability Support Pension), and paying a minimum amount of rent.

Also in the 2011-12 Budget, there were changes to Youth Allowance to encourage young people to study and work. Unemployed young people aged 21 will be eligible for Youth Allowance (Other) rather than Newstart Allowance and will be able to keep more of what they earn, with the increased income free area (from \$62 to \$143 per fortnight) and working credit limit (from \$1,000 to \$3,500).

Described in the Australian Government's White Paper as '*Turning off the tap*', early intervention and prevention represent one of the principle strategies set out in the White Paper for tackling homelessness.

While the Australian Government agrees in principle with the concept of a commitment to an adequate supply of appropriate accommodation options, it notes that significant control over this rests with the States and Territories. While this response has noted a range of initiatives the government is progressing to increase the supply of affordable housing (see response to Recommendation 1), this needs to be done without detriment to the other strategies so that a balance of effort on key strategies like early intervention and prevention can be sustained.

Recommendation 7

That new homelessness legislation specify the right of all Australians to adequate housing. Such a provision should:

- **include appropriate reference to Australia's international human rights obligations;**
- **include a clear definition of adequate housing; and**
- **explicitly recognise the right to adequate housing will be progressively realised.**

AGREE IN PART

In accordance with Australia's Human Rights Framework, the Government believes that it is important to ensure that Australia's domestic laws acknowledge and comply with the seven core United Nations human rights treaties to which Australia is a party. This includes the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR), which provides for a right to adequate housing.

Many of the ICESCR rights, including the right to adequate housing, are progressive in nature and depend upon the availability of Government resources. Accordingly, definitions in the legislation would need to be flexible enough to reflect the changing needs of society, as well as the resources of Government over time.

The preamble of the current SAA Act recognises the importance of protecting the rights of people at risk of homelessness, or who are experiencing homelessness. The Government will similarly include appropriate reference to relevant human rights instruments in the proposed legislation. Such acknowledgement emphasises the important role of human rights in achieving the Government's goals, such as to halve the rate of homelessness by 2020.

Recommendation 8

That the Minister for Housing include provision in new homelessness legislation to give priority access within available resources to services and supports based on an assessment of the needs and vulnerability.

AGREE IN PRINCIPLE

The Australian Government recognises that people who are experiencing or at risk of homelessness have different needs and that some people are more vulnerable than others. However, the Australian Government supports a flexible, multi-pronged approach which, as well as providing support for those in greatest need, also attempts to prevent people at risk of homelessness actually becoming homeless.

This approach is also reflected in the way that funding is provided to the States and Territories. The NPAH between the Commonwealth and State and Territory governments recognises the need to target key groups and provides that prioritisation of effort against specified outputs is established in each jurisdiction's Implementation Plan. All States and Territories are committed under the NPAH to deliver on core outputs to reduce homelessness. There are additional outputs that address the needs of specific vulnerable groups such as youth, the aged, women and children experiencing family violence, and others. Each jurisdiction also assesses the "priorities and relative effort applied" to these outputs under their Implementation Plans. This approach recognises that the challenges faced by the homeless population are varied across jurisdictions, and are changing over time.

The Australian Government also recognises that States and Territories directly fund service providers and State and Territory governments are also responsible for public housing allocations, which prioritise those in greatest need.

New legislation should identify that different groups have different particular vulnerabilities and needs. However, the current framework allows the States and Territories flexibility and responsiveness to both changing priorities and differing local needs that legislative prescription may not. The Australian Government agrees with the objective of this recommendation but it is not for the Commonwealth to stipulate the approach that the jurisdictions should take. While it is not considered appropriate to specify the funding decisions that the States and Territories should make, the Government will consider expressing in legislation its commitment to working cooperatively with the States to support this principle.

Recommendation 9

That the Minister for Housing include provision in new legislation for the independent monitoring of the progress towards the realisation of the right of all Australians to adequate housing. Data collection mechanisms should allow monitoring of progress for specified vulnerable and marginalised population groups.

AGREE IN PRINCIPLE

The Australian Government agrees that monitoring progress against the White Paper targets and measuring the effectiveness of policies and programs in addressing homelessness is essential. The Australian Government is aware that its targets for reducing homelessness are ambitious, and recognises the importance of tracking progress toward their achievement. The Government also acknowledges the importance of monitoring to ensure that it is effectively implementing its international obligations, including the progressive realisation of the right of all Australians to adequate housing.

Monitoring is central to ensuring that progress and impact stay on track, and is a key part of the partnership framework with States and Territories.

The Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) has been reviewing the *Counting the Homeless* methodology aiming to improve the quality and timeliness of its homelessness estimates and also the transparency and consistency of the methodology. The ABS acknowledged that there were significant undercounts and over-counts in the Census homelessness data because the Census data were not a perfect mechanism for identifying homeless people. The review focuses on past estimation methods and existing Census data sets to remove over-identification. Such over-identification has the potential to obscure the true size of the homeless population, mask where homeless people are located, misrepresent the characteristics of those who are homeless, and prevent valid measurement of progress over time.

The Australian Government is developing a range of short and long-term data sets to be read in collaboration with the ABS data to provide an overall report on the performance indicators. A key example is the work being undertaken by the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare with States and Territories on the new Specialist Homelessness Services Collection (SHSC). The SHSC collects information on services provided to people who are homeless or at risk of homelessness including people from vulnerable groups such as refugees, Indigenous people, people with mental illness and prisoners.

Another example is *Journeys Home: Longitudinal Study of Factors Affecting Housing Stability* which aims to improve the understanding of and policy response to, the diverse social, economic and personal factors related to homelessness and the risk of becoming homeless. *Journeys Home* is the first large-scale longitudinal study assessing income support recipients who are homeless, at risk of, or vulnerable to homelessness. The survey consists of up to four waves, each six months apart, from September 2011 to the first half of 2013. The evidence will assist the Government to target investments in homelessness, support programs and will inform other policy development as well as research projects.

As performance monitoring is carried out against the effective use of grants of financial assistance paid to States and Territories under the new federal financial relations

legislation, and is stipulated in the formal agreements that provide for that funding, the Australian Government does not consider it appropriate to incorporate these arrangements in new homelessness legislation. The Australian Government remains committed, however, to ensuring that the impact and effectiveness of reforms and the progress against the White Paper targets are monitored and measured.

Recommendation 10

That the Australian Government, in cooperation with state and territory governments, conduct an audit of laws and policies that impact disproportionately on people experiencing homelessness. Laws and policies that do not conform to anti-discrimination and human rights obligations should be amended accordingly. Priority should be given to review and amendment of:

- **anti-discrimination laws;**
- **residential tenancy laws; and**
- **public space laws.**

AGREE IN PRINCIPLE

The Australian Government is already undertaking significant reforms to ensure that its legislation, policy and practices are consistent with its international human rights obligations. Over time, the Government will also review legislation, policies and practice for compliance with the seven core United Nations human rights treaties to which Australia is a party.

These treaties include ICESCR, which provides for a right to adequate housing. In addition, the new Parliamentary Joint Committee on Human Rights¹ will have the power to examine Acts for compatibility with human rights and to report to both Houses of Parliament on its findings.

The Government has also committed to consolidating Commonwealth anti-discrimination laws into a single Act to address inconsistencies and make the law more user-friendly by clarifying relevant rights and obligations. The consolidation project also provides an opportunity to review the processes for handling complaints of unlawful discrimination and the related role and functions of the Australian Human Rights Commission. In announcing the consolidation project, the Attorney-General emphasised that there will be no diminution of existing protections currently available under Commonwealth legislation. The Government has also committed to introducing sexual orientation and gender identity protections through the consolidation project. These changes will help support sex and/or gender diverse people who may otherwise encounter discrimination when accessing emergency housing, an issue which has previously come to the attention of the Australian Human Rights Commission.

¹ The *Human Rights (Parliamentary Scrutiny) Act 2011* provides for the establishment of a Parliamentary Joint Committee on Human Rights.

The issue of homelessness was more generally discussed in recent consultation on a discussion paper on the consolidation project launched by the Attorney-General and the Minister for Finance and Deregulation in September 2011.

The Australian Government is also working with states and territories to examine areas of policy that affect homelessness, such as tenancy laws, which are a State government responsibility. A report on tenancy laws produced by the National Association of Tenant Organisations at the request of peak housing advocacy body National Shelter was provided to the then Housing Ministers' Conference in 2011. The report makes a number of recommendations for the reform of tenancy laws for greater consistency and stronger protections for tenants. Ministers agreed, in consultation with Consumer Affairs Ministers, to consider the issue of tenancy laws in relation to homelessness. The Minister for Housing and Minister for Homelessness will pursue ongoing discussion on the opportunities for reform in this area, through the Select Council on Housing and Homelessness.

The NAHA commits its parties, including State and Territory governments and (on behalf of local government) the Australian Local Government Association, to addressing the issue of social inclusion and remains a vehicle for promoting awareness of issues and driving change. Programs implemented at the local and state government level such as the City of Sydney's appointment of a Public Space Liaison Officer to foster co-operative and compassionate relationships with homeless people using public spaces, and the *Victorian protocol for people who are homeless in public spaces*, are examples of positive change.

Recommendation 11

That new homelessness legislation provide overarching principles to underpin a national standards and accreditation framework for services used by homeless people and those at increased risk of homelessness. Prescriptive standards should be expressed in complementary non legislative agreements with state and territory governments and, through them, with service providers.

AGREE IN PRINCIPLE

The Australian Government agrees that the Homelessness National Quality Framework should be underpinned by overarching principles to guide policy, effort and practice. It also agrees that these principles will have greatest effect if they are in legislation. This would also ensure a common, explicit understanding of a set of universal quality concepts that sit transparently within the context of Australia's Social Inclusion agenda.

The Australian Government agrees to consider the use of non-legislative agreements as the mechanism for setting out specific standards under the overarching principles, however, following the consultations on the Homelessness National Quality Framework the final model is yet to be determined by relevant Ministers under new COAG arrangements. Arrangements should reflect the commitment shared between the Commonwealth and State and Territory governments and the sector, to supporting the provision of quality services. To a large extent, the way standards are documented or codified will depend on the larger shape of the Homelessness National Quality Framework and how it is put into effect once this is agreed by Ministers.

Recommendation 12

That the Minister for Housing, through the Housing Ministers' Conference, support the introduction of a national standards and accreditation framework which:

- **provides a broad national service charter to guide mainstream services in their delivery of services to people experiencing homelessness or at risk of homelessness; and**
- **sets specific minimum quality standards for specialist homelessness services, leading progressively to accreditation.**

AGREE IN PRINCIPLE

The Australian Government is involved in the consideration of a Homelessness National Quality Framework through the Housing Ministers' Conference (HMC) and the development of options for discussion. (In future this will occur through the Select Council on Housing and Homelessness under revised COAG arrangements.)

In March 2009, HMC agreed that a national quality framework is necessary to underpin the major homelessness reforms, that its development requires national effort and that its development should be a priority item on the COAG work program. In September 2009, HMC agreed to public consultations on elements of a national quality framework in early 2010 and in February of that year released a discussion paper for the first of two stages of consultations. Charters, standards and accreditation and the engagement of mainstream services were considered as part of the community consultations.

The second stage of consultations in 2011 sought views on options that approach the elements identified by the Committee in different ways. The new Select Council on Housing and Homelessness have considered the outcomes of the consultations and have committed to engaging a consultant to help identify the most appropriate model. The Australian Government does not wish to pre-empt the outcome of that process but is committed to supporting, through the Ministerial Council, the introduction of a Homelessness National Quality Framework.

Recommendation 13

That the Australian Government consult with state and territory governments, and other key stakeholders to develop a national regulatory system based on core service standards to be broadly applied to community services, including homelessness services.

AGREE

The Australian Government notes that the application of standards to the broad community service sector relates much more broadly than just to homelessness and the terms of reference of the Inquiry. This is a complex issue involving programs and payments with a range of accountabilities across and between governments.

The Productivity Commission's February 2010 report *The Contribution of the Not-for-Profit Sector* touches on the tension between greater calls for accountability for public spending and the administrative burden on not-for-profit entities funded to provide services to Australians in need.

In the 2011-12 Budget, the Australian Government announced that it will undertake negotiations with the States and Territories on national regulation for the not-for-profit sector, and on a new national regulator, with the aim of minimising reporting and other regulatory requirements through coordinated national arrangements.

In relation to homelessness, the Homelessness National Quality Framework will focus on the specialist homelessness service sector initially, then broadening its focus to encourage the voluntary participation of mainstream and allied services that provide support to people experiencing or at risk of homelessness.

In the interim, the former Housing Ministers' Conference committed to a number of guiding principles in its initial consultation discussion paper for the development of the Homelessness National Quality Framework, including the need to minimise administrative burden. This will remain a key consideration as the Homelessness National Quality Framework is developed.

Recommendation 14

That the Minister for Housing consult with the Housing Ministers' Conference and key sectoral stakeholders about the essential components of a national standards and accreditation framework to determine the broad principles and minimum standards to apply to specialist homelessness services.

AGREE

The Commonwealth is working collaboratively with States and Territories on the development of a Homelessness National Quality Framework. In February 2010 the Housing Ministers' Conference (HMC) released the discussion paper *A national quality framework to support quality services for people experiencing homelessness*. This paper formed the basis of national public consultations that occurred from February to April 2010. The consultation process gathered views on what quality service provision is and mechanisms to support quality service delivery.

A second phase of consultations was conducted in early 2011 to explore options for the Homelessness National Quality Framework. Following analysis of the outcomes of the second stage consultations it is expected that the Ministerial Council (in the form of the new Select Council on Housing and Homelessness) will consider options and make a decision later in 2012. The Government commits to continue to consult with key stakeholders as the components of the Homelessness National Quality Framework are developed.

The Prime Minister's Council on Homelessness, which consists of key sectoral stakeholders, has also provided advice on the development of the Homelessness National Quality Framework.

Recommendation 15

That the Minister for Housing ensure provision for reciprocal recognition of existing quality service frameworks is incorporated into a national standards and accreditation system for homelessness services.

AGREE

The Housing Ministers' Conference discussion paper *A national quality framework to support quality services for people experiencing homelessness* included the guiding principle that "Minimising red tape will be a key consideration in the development of the National Quality Framework". The discussion paper gave a commitment to consider how participation in other quality service frameworks can be recognised by a Homelessness National Quality Framework.

The consultations explored this issue, with feedback continuing to underline the importance of this issue. The Australian Government will ensure that a focus on the balance between minimising red tape for services and maintaining confidence in service quality is maintained as the Ministerial Council develops the Homelessness National Quality Framework. The Australian Government agrees that the standards framework that is developed by the Ministerial Council should recognise achievement under other frameworks so that services are not asked to duplicate their efforts.