

FINAL INQUIRY REPORT

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Ending homelessness in Australia: A redesigned homelessness service system

PEER
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From the AHURI Inquiry: An effective homelessness services system

Authored by

Angela Spinney, Swinburne University of Technology

Andrew Beer, University of South Australia

David MacKenzie, Swinburne University of Technology

Sean McNelis, Swinburne University of Technology

Ariella Meltzer, University of New South Wales

Kristy Muir, University of New South Wales

Andrew Peters, Swinburne University of Technology

kylie valentine, University of New South Wales

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Authors

Angela Spinney, Swinburne University of Technology
Andrew Beer, University of South Australia
David MacKenzie, Swinburne University of Technology
Sean McNelis, Swinburne University of Technology
Ariella Meltzer, University of New South Wales
Kristy Muir, University of New South Wales
Andrew Peters, Swinburne University of Technology
kylie valentine, University of New South Wales

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AHURI undertakes evidence-based policy development on a range of priority policy topics that are of interest to our audience groups, including housing and labour markets, urban growth and renewal, planning and infrastructure development, housing supply and affordability, homelessness, economic productivity, and social cohesion and wellbeing.

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Inquiry panel members

Each AHURI Inquiry is supported by a panel of experts drawn from the research, policy and practice communities.

The Inquiry Panel provides guidance on ways to maximise the policy relevance of the research and draw together the research findings to address the key policy implications of the research. Panel members for this Inquiry:

- Jenny Smith, Council to Homeless Persons
- Bryan Lipmann, AM and Michael Deschepper, Wintringham, Victoria
- Sally Kubiak and Nat Smith, Aboriginal Housing Office, New South Wales
- Dr Michael Coffey, Catholic Care Diocese of Broken Bay, New South Wales
- Sherri Bruinhout, Victorian Government, Department of Health and Human Services
- Natasha Boyle, Queensland Government, Homelessness Programs
- Sidesh Naikar and Paul Hardcastle, Australian Government, Department of Social Services

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Acronyms and abbreviations used in this report

ABS	Australian Bureau of Statistics
ACH	Assistance with Care and Housing
AHURI	Australian Housing and Urban Research Institute Limited
AIHW	Australian Institute of Health and Welfare
COAG	Council of Australian Governments
COSS	Community of Schools and Services
CRA	Commonwealth Rent Assistance
DFV	Domestic and family violence
FEANTSA	European Federation of National Organisations Working with the Homeless
NAHA	National Affordable Housing Agreement
NHHA	National Housing and Homelessness Agreement
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
PATS	Patient Assistance Travel Scheme (Northern Territory)
RQ	Research question
SAAP	Supported Accommodation Assistance Program
SHS	Specialist Homelessness Service
WAAEH	WA Alliance to End Homelessness

Glossary

A list of definitions for terms commonly used by AHURI is available on the AHURI website www.ahuri.edu.au/research/glossary.

Executive summary

Key points

- Homelessness is a complex social problem that intersects with a range of other social, economic, health and justice issues.
- As such, homelessness requires a more integrated cross-sectorial response, involving mainstream systems and specialist services.
- The existing Australian homelessness service system has known strengths but its effectiveness is constrained for different population groups.
- Notwithstanding this, homelessness is a solvable problem. Overseas experience shows that homelessness can be prevented and virtually ended.
- Homelessness in Australia can be reduced and ultimately ended, but the existing status quo of systems and programs needs major reform.
- An emerging trend nationally and internationally is to reorient homelessness service systems towards prevention and away from a largely crisis response.
- This report lays out some guidelines for how Australia could virtually end homelessness through a redesign of the homelessness service system.
- A fundamental system change is proposed in the approach to homelessness in Australia that would:
 - focus on prevention and early intervention rather than a largely crisis response

- ensure every person is quickly provided with appropriate assistance via a 'duty to assist' protocol
- incorporate a Housing First response for people experiencing homelessness so that they can move as quickly as possible into needs and age appropriate long-term housing options
- develop long-term plans for an adequate supply of social and affordable housing.
- **A new, integrated national homelessness initiative and funding arrangement is proposed that will give effect to a fundamentally changed approach to homelessness and a reconfigured homelessness service system.**
- **A reimagining of the Australian homelessness service system is proposed, with the primary elements being:**
 - a changed role for universal welfare services and Specialist Homelessness Services (SHSs) such that universal welfare services instigate systematic screening for risk of homelessness, operate a 'duty to assist' policy, provide brokerage funding to assist clients to maintain existing housing or access new housing, and referrals to SHSs and Housing First agencies, when necessary
 - encouragement and support from state and territory governments for place-based collaborations and alliances of the providers of homelessness services, mainstream welfare services and institutions and governments as the focus of a reimagined response to homelessness.

The study

The homelessness service system in Australia comprises national intergovernmental agreements around homelessness services, state and territory strategies, and over 1,500 Specialist Homelessness Services (SHSs) that provide a range of services to support clients who are homeless or at risk of homelessness. Australian governments fund a range of SHSs to support people who are homeless or at risk of homelessness. These services are delivered by non-government organisations including agencies specialising in delivering services to specific target groups (such as people escaping domestic violence), as well as those that provide more generic services to people facing housing crises. SHSs support those who have become homeless and those who are at imminent risk of homelessness. Importantly, SHSs are funded by diverse sources: state and territory governments, the Australian Government, charitable organisations and other sources, including local governments (Flatau, Zaretsky et al. 2017). This has resulted in a highly fragmented system. Addressing this complexity is one essential step in ending homelessness in Australia.

Australia does not have a national homelessness strategy. It does, however, have a funding agreement between the Australian Government and the state and territory governments. This agreement recognises the Commonwealth and the states' mutual interest in improving outcomes across the housing spectrum, including outcomes for Australians who are homeless or at risk of homelessness, and the need to work together to achieve those outcomes. It has long been recognised that a more connected, integrated and responsive service system is required to address homelessness. A system with improved links between homelessness services and mainstream or universal welfare services is desirable.

This Inquiry into an effective homelessness service system addressed the overall research question:

How can the homelessness service system be redesigned and implemented to be effective for different groups across the life course?

The research undertaken in this Inquiry and the chapters of this report are based on three supporting research questions:

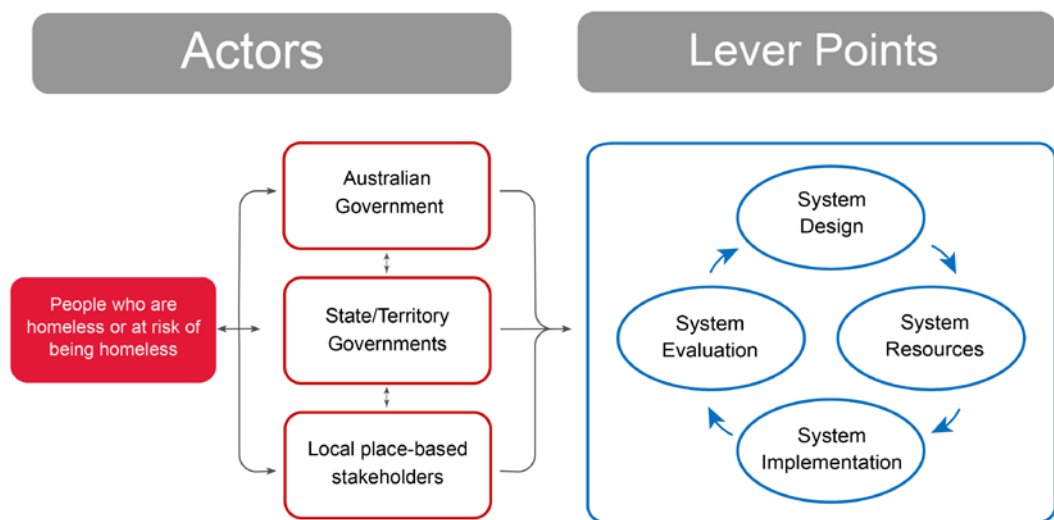
1. What can we learn from national and international homelessness service systems for the future?
2. What are the key levers for creating an effective homelessness service system?
 - regarding the balance of early intervention, prevention and crisis provision?
 - regarding funding and commissioning arrangements of Specialist Homelessness Services?
 - regarding the relationships between specialist and mainstream services?
3. How might Australia reconfigure our homelessness service system in order to effectively support the prevention and minimisation of homelessness across the life course?

The Inquiry included three projects that examined the Australian homelessness service system from the perspectives of different groups of homeless people at different life stages – young people, families and children, and older people. All projects focussed on the particular needs of Indigenous Australians. In seeking to answer the overall Inquiry research question, each sub-project had its own set of research questions and its own method of research. Yet, they all worked together to answer the overarching Inquiry research question.

Our application of a systems thinking approach generated new insights into the effectiveness of the homelessness service system through a focus on the levers that can create influence. The Inquiry brought together—for the first time—the principles of systems thinking and concepts of Indigenous knowledge as a methodology throughout the Inquiry. The Inquiry was driven by these principles as a way of utilising Indigenous and Western knowledge and research methodologies, and acknowledging how both can exist, inform and complement each other to ensure a robust, authentic and fruitful process.

In Figure 1, we outline the major actors and lever points in Australia's homelessness service system. Our analysis is underpinned by this analytical lens in order to propose a potential reconfiguration of the Australian homelessness service system. This includes an enhanced focus on homelessness prevention and Housing First measures, a proposed system of alliances between governments and purchased services, and a 'duty to assist' role for universal welfare services. Levers can be defined as actions or interventions that actors or agents can put in place within a system to break existing negative feedback loops and prompt change in how a system functions (Maani and Cavana 2007). The actors or agents within a system are the people or organisations who have the capacity to either progress or block change on a problem (Abercrombie, Harries et al. 2015).

Figure 1: Actors and lever points in the homelessness service system



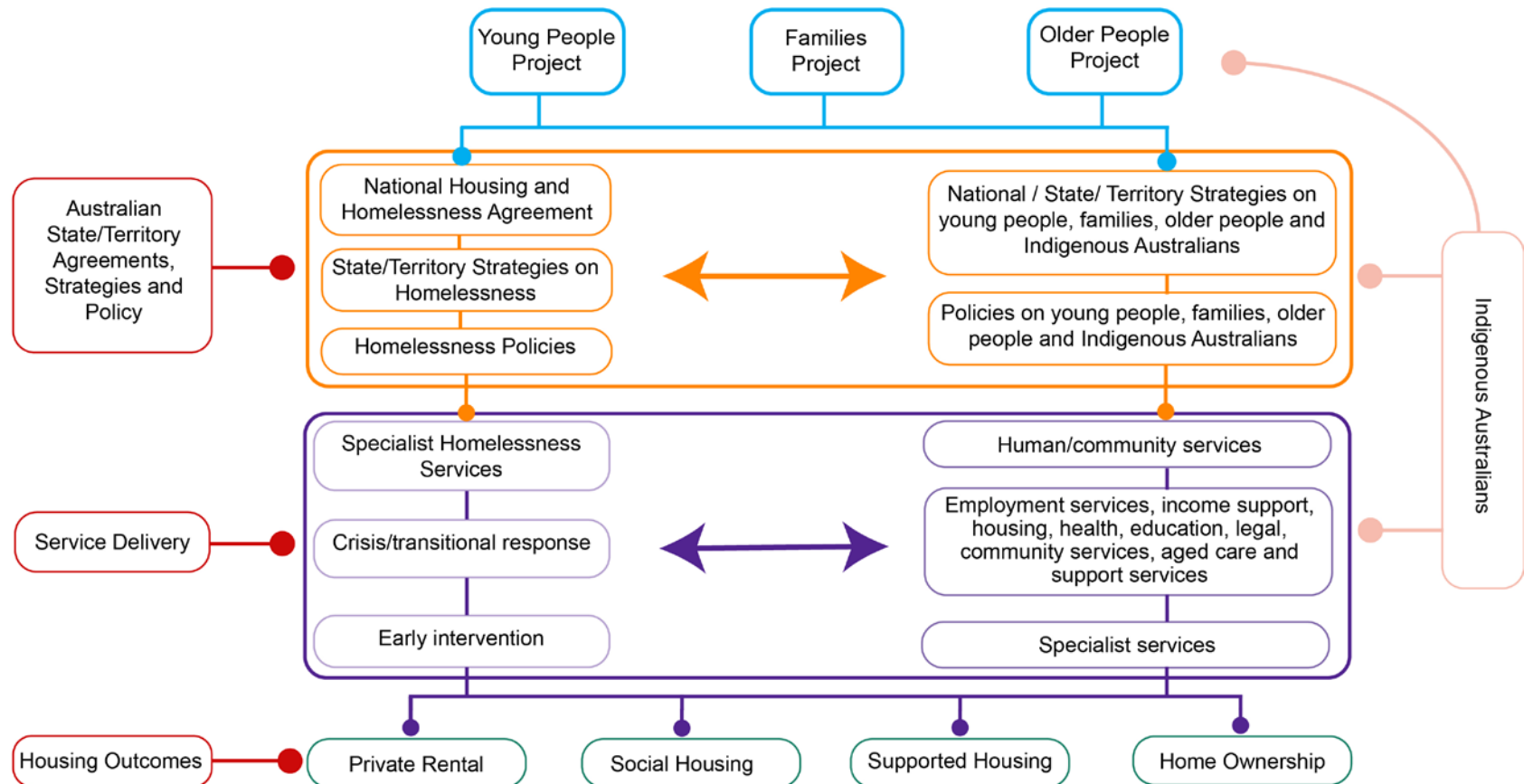
Source: Authors.

In Figure 2, we present the initial policy and practice framework that guided our investigation of the existing national homelessness service system as a fundamental component of the research design. The relationships between specific homelessness policies, strategies and services and more general interventions by governments are indicated by arrows. The relationships between the different levels of government indicated by arrows.

This framework serves two ends. It is:

- a framework for a comprehensive mapping of the existing homelessness service system in Australia
- a framework for analysing the policy and practice proposals considered in the report that would improve the linkages and ways of working between different parts of the currently siloed homelessness service system – these are linkages which include not only SHSs but also the planning and delivery of other mainstream human services to prevent and assess homelessness.

Figure 2: Initial policy and practice framework



Source: Authors.

Key findings

Homelessness is a complex social problem that intersects with a range of other social issues, particularly poverty, income support, housing, health, and access to jobs, training and education. As a complex social problem, homelessness requires a place-based response, not only from SHS agencies but also from universal welfare services, such as income support, housing, health, mental health, justice, community aged care, employment and education providers.

Homelessness can be prevented despite its persistence and complexity as a social problem in Australia. Prevention and early intervention are emerging as key policy imperatives in several Australian jurisdictions and in other comparable countries. In general terms, this will mean a shift away from a focus on the provision of crises services. Instead, responses that arrest the flow of different cohorts into homelessness, rapid rehousing, and appropriate housing options for different cohorts in the homelessness population will become key.

The starting point for a national homelessness initiative is attention to the rights and needs of homeless people. A rights-based approach to service provision involves self-determination and a voice in the assistance being provided to clients of services. While this is a general principle, it is especially important for the response to Indigenous homelessness, where Indigenous communities need to be included in the planning, provision and the delivery of services to Indigenous communities.

Successfully reducing and ending homelessness will require a high level of commitment from all tiers of government, from universal welfare services, from SHSs and from the Australian community. This is a long-term project requiring a continuous and constant integrated approach over many years.

This research found that the existing Australian homelessness service system is mainly oriented towards crisis responses. However, many countries are now orienting their wider service systems towards prevention.

We found relevant examples of innovation were:

- Housing First approaches
- integrated place-based strategies to reduce homelessness
- innovative practices in homelessness prevention and reduction in Australia, as well as overseas in Norway, Finland and three of the four countries of the United Kingdom
- the 'duty to assist' role for universal welfare services proposed in the Canadian roadmap to end youth homelessness
- examples of contractual alliances of purchased services that integrate homeless service provision and improve access to services (such as in Glasgow, Scotland).

Some of the key levers we discovered through our fieldwork are appropriate to all users of the Australian homelessness service system. Others are interventions that would be more effective for some cohorts than others. We used these findings to establish the key levers influencing the effectiveness of the Australian homelessness service system overall. These are:

- creating prevention and early intervention platforms through flexibility of approach and simplicity of access to services
- innovative and affordable housing options and a rethinking of social housing
- recognising the needs of Indigenous Australians
- collaboration between different service sectors and better system integration between service systems
- increasing financial supports, greater employment opportunities and increasing economic security
- improving relevant education, training and awareness for people at risk of homelessness.

Different priorities are relevant to different life stages, as follows:

- young people tend to keep to a fairly tight geographical area, and place-based solutions are needed
- domestic and family violence continues to be a major cause of homelessness for families
- older women are a new, emerging cohort to face homelessness, and action to arrest this trend is needed.

The research found a need for a reconfigured homelessness service system that provides:

- assertive outreach
- easier access into the homelessness service system
- the building of prevention and early intervention platforms
- cross-sectoral system integration
- local services to keep people in place
- culturally appropriate services for Indigenous Australians.

Policy development options

This report lays out a blueprint for how Australia could reduce and end homelessness by reorienting the Australian homelessness service system towards early intervention and prevention of homelessness, including:

- a new national homelessness initiative
- new cross-sectoral partnership funding arrangements
- an enhanced role for universal welfare services in their 'duty to assist', where they adopt a 'first to know, first to act' approach by:
 - screening all clients to assess for risk of homelessness
 - seeking to prevent homelessness through the use of assistance and brokerage funding
 - referring to an SHS when necessary for assistance into Housing First or, if necessary, crisis accommodation.
- developing local place-based alliances between governments and purchased services
- providing exit points from crisis services and the support required to sustain their tenancies and lives
- adopting a 'Housing First' approach which, for any homelessness service system to work effectively, requires an adequately planned supply of long-term affordable and social housing that is appropriate, secure and safe.

Implementation

As this is the first time a suite of policy development options for the reconfiguration of the homelessness service system has been brought together in Australia, further research is required to establish how the suggested key levers could work together (or against each other) to ensure the homelessness service system is more effective.

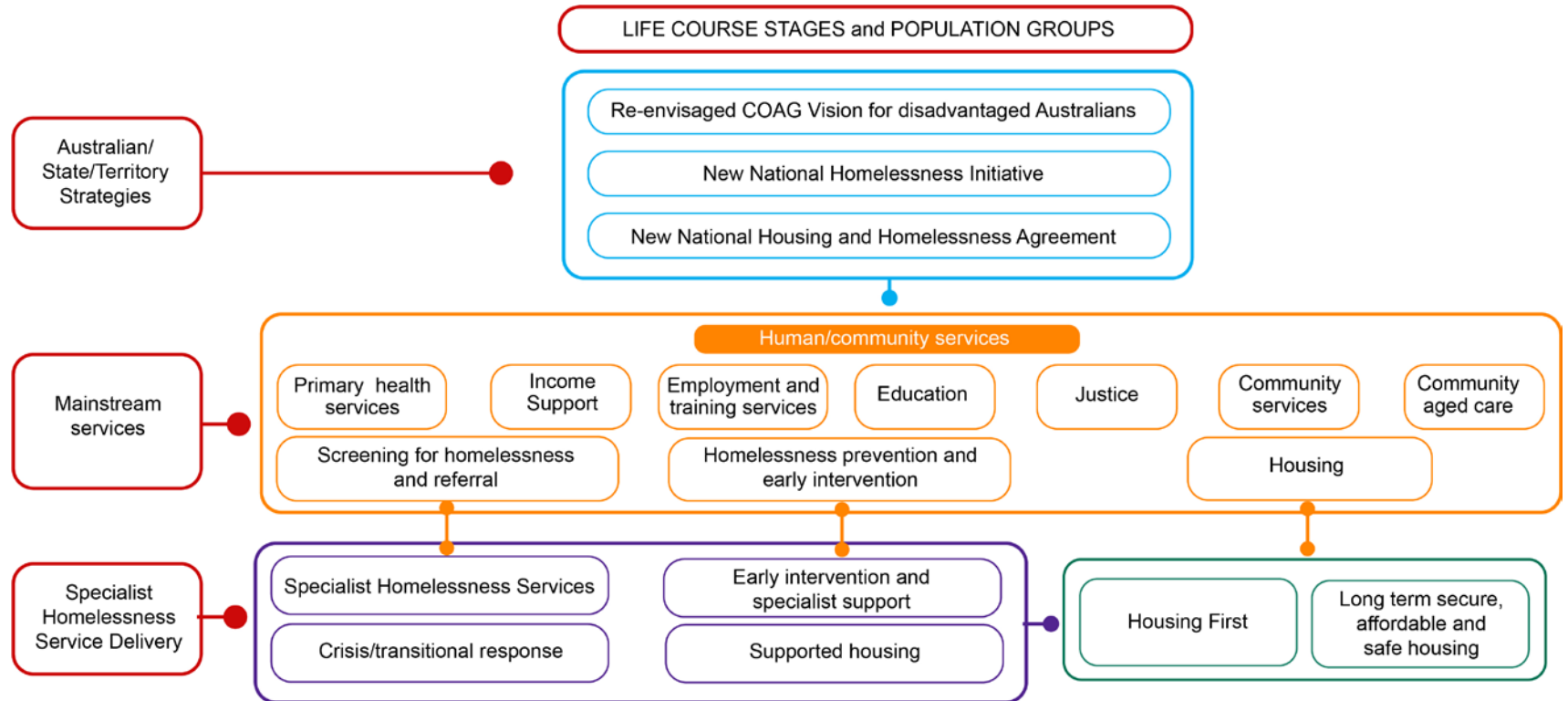
One of the ways this could be achieved is by piloting a series of organisational alliances to end homelessness in each state and territory. Likewise, specific geographical locations could pilot universal welfare agencies trialling the proposed 'duty to assist' by screening, and assisting, their clients at risk of homelessness, and referring those who they are unable to help through brokerage funds and housing advice. Targets could be set for each state and territory, and key performance indicators set for government agencies.

This report proposes a potential reconfiguration of the Australian homelessness service system. As illustrated in Figure 3, this reconfiguration includes:

- a new, integrated national homelessness initiative
- new cross-sectoral partnership funding arrangements
- adopting a 'Housing First' approach which, for any homelessness service system to work effectively, would require an adequate supply of long-term affordable and social housing that is appropriate, secure and safe
- an enhanced role for universal welfare services in their 'duty to assist' where they adopt a 'first to know, first to act' type of approach by:
 - screening all clients to assess for risk of homelessness
 - seeking to prevent homelessness by use of assistance and brokerage funding
 - referring to an SHS when necessary for assistance into Housing First or, if necessary, crisis accommodation.

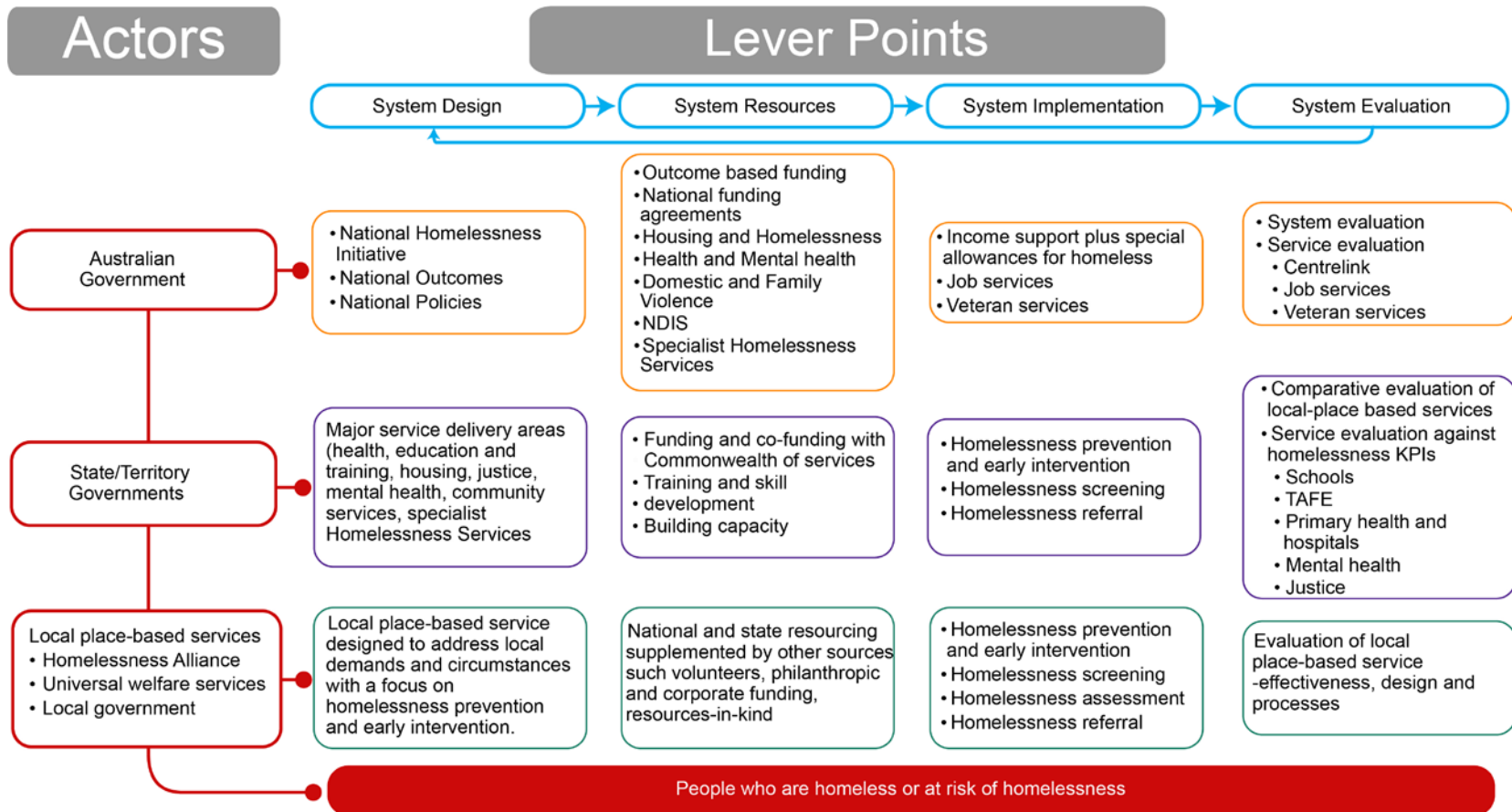
Figure 4 illustrates in more detail our proposed reconfiguration of the homelessness service system. It outlines the actors (the Australian Government, state and territory governments and local service delivery organisations) and the lever points (system design, system resources, system implementation and system evaluation). Each actor will use the lever points differently depending upon their role in the homelessness service system. Figure 4 also locates the development of local place-based alliances between government and purchased services.

Figure 3: A blueprint for reconfiguring the institutional structure of the homelessness service system



Source: Authors.

Figure 4: A blueprint for a reconfigured homelessness service system detailing actors and lever points



Source: Authors.

Indigenous research methodologies

An important finding of this Inquiry is that Indigenous research methodologies can be effectively augmented with system thinking approaches to provide both improved qualitative research methodologies and improved research outcomes. This dual approach should apply to both Indigenous and non-Indigenous homelessness and housing research.

Indigenous research methodologies can help everyone, not just Indigenous Australians. This can be achieved through recognition of the key elements of Indigenous methodologies, such as connection, reflexivity and reciprocity.

Acknowledgment and recognition of the important role of culture throughout the whole process of shaping and implementing a redesigned homelessness service system is vital in order for it to work effectively.

This report is the latest in a series on how effectively the homelessness service system works for people at different stages of the life course. Together, they build up the case for major change to the existing homelessness service and provide a blueprint for effective change. What is true of Australia, as elsewhere, is that the cost of providing crisis accommodation is often more expensive than providing housing support. However, it must also be recognised that in order for any homelessness service system to work effectively there needs to be an adequate appropriate supply of long-term affordable and social housing.

1. Introduction

The existing Australian homelessness service system is diverse. While the system possesses many accomplished strengths compared to several other countries, the social problem of homelessness continues. A major challenge is that the effectiveness of homelessness services are institutionally constrained by the inadequacy of preventative responses prior to homelessness, as well as inadequate housing pathways and options for people moving out of homelessness services. A key consideration is how well the homelessness service system operates as part of a unified and effective broader service system response to homelessness and risk of homelessness. Currently, an understanding of the effectiveness of the homelessness service system is lacking, due to inadequate or non-existent contemporary evidence around:

- how the different parts of the broader service system interact
- how specialist homelessness services interact with other universal welfare services
- how these different service sectors could be improved to better meet the needs of homeless people as part of a more integrated approach.

The existing homelessness service system operates in the context of:

- **no national homelessness framework to end homelessness**
- **a complex system of funding through national intergovernmental agreements**
- **a National Housing and Homelessness Agreement that is operationalised somewhat differently in different Australian jurisdictions**
- **a focus on a crisis response to homelessness provided by specialist homelessness services, rather than a focus on early intervention and prevention and the involvement of mainstream human service agencies.**

While various aspects of homelessness have been researched, only one prior Australian Housing and Urban Research Institute (AHURI) study has examined homelessness services as a system.

This research was informed by systems thinking and Indigenous research methods and included literature reviews, yarning circles and interviews.

1.1 Why this research was conducted

Homelessness is an issue of major social concern in Australia (Spinney, Habibis et al. 2016; Brackertz, Fotheringham et al. 2016). The 2016 Census recorded 116,427 homeless people, an increase of 4.6 per cent over the previous five years (ABS 2018). In 2018–2019, 209,300 persons were assisted in Australia by specialist homelessness services (AIHW 2019).

Over the last 35 plus years, Australia has had an evolving homelessness service system. Yet, at the same time, homelessness numbers have increased. The changing context in which homelessness responses are made requires changes in the way homelessness services are conceptualised, institutionally shaped and supported, as well as delivered to support key population groups. A business-as-usual response is failing to address increasing incidence of homelessness for core population groups.

The drivers of homelessness in Australia are well understood, and include:

- poverty, including the need to increase income support levels (Thredgold, Beer et al. 2019; valentine, Blunden et al. 2020)
- the link between domestic and family violence (DFV) and women and children becoming homeless (Spinney 2012)
- the need to lessen the numbers of young people who feel they cannot continue living in the family home (McKenzie, Hand et al. 2020)
- the need to lessen the impacts of colonisation and discrimination for Indigenous Australians (valentine, Blunden et al. 2020; Spinney, Habibis et al. 2016)
- the need to increase the supply of affordable suitable housing for all stages of the life course in all parts of Australia (Hulse, Reynolds et al. 2019; Parkinson, Batterham et al. 2019).

The Australian homelessness service system is intended to address homelessness and incorporates policy and practice frameworks from the local to national levels. There are known strengths and challenges with the existing system, and constraints on its effectiveness for different population groups. Where once the homeless population was viewed to almost entirely comprise males – and often older males – there is increased awareness of the diversity among people who are homeless (AIHW 2018).

Up until now, there has been no adequate understanding of the effectiveness of the homelessness service system: how the different parts of the system interact, how homelessness services interact with other universal welfare services, and how these aspects could be improved to better meet the needs of homeless people. Furthermore, in effect, what has emerged over time is a piecemeal system, rather than a seamless national homelessness service system across Australia. This means that people facing homelessness receive varied levels of effective support, depending on their location (Flatau, Zaretsky et al. 2016; Brackertz, Fotheringham et al. 2016).

SHSs are non-government organisations that deliver homelessness services. Although previous research has emphasised that homelessness services are cost-effective (Brackertz, Fotheringham et al. 2016), until now little analysis has been undertaken regarding service provision on a system-wide scale. Relatively little is known about how homeless clients interact with various health and social service systems, or about the relative effectiveness of prevention, early intervention, crisis response and provision of long-term housing at each stage of the life course. This Inquiry sought to develop a greater understanding of these matters and to propose changes that can work together to help end homelessness in Australia.

The research builds explicitly on previous AHURI and other research, as synthesised by Brackertz, Fotheringham et al. (2016), and more recent research by AHURI authors (Flatau, Zaretzky et al. 2017; Spinney, Habibis et al. 2016). We use a systems thinking approach for analysing the homelessness service system and other systems, supported by three interrelated projects that introduce Indigenous methodologies to contribute to a shared overarching conceptual framework. Together, the projects explore an effective homelessness service system for specific life stages in a coherent, integrated research design.

Our exploration of how integrated system responses can produce change at local levels to end homelessness has confirmed that homelessness could be eradicated in Australia if we have the political and organisational will. To achieve this, a concerted reshaping of the homelessness service system in Australia is required – a reshaping that will cause major changes to the ways homelessness is prevented and assessed, while stimulating growth in the provision of long-term affordable and social housing to accommodate people. A blueprint to achieve this is explored in this report. This research contributes to policy development and practice change by providing an evidence-base and policy recommendations for innovative reconfiguring of the Australian homelessness service system, in order to strategically and systematically support the prevention and minimisation of homelessness across the life course.

1.2 Research design

1.2.1 Systems thinking and Indigenous research methodologies

Our Inquiry research was informed by systems thinking and Indigenous research methodologies.

Systems thinking

Systems thinking involves:

- understanding the relationships between different parts of the system that make up a complex social problem
- identifying where change or improvement can occur to solve the problem, by addressing a particularly influential point (or points) within a system
- addressing the root causes of the problem by looking at what dynamics emerge from the whole system, rather than its individual parts (OECD 2017; Abercrombie, Harries et al. 2015).

Stroh and Zurcher (2012: 4) argue that implementing a systems thinking approach involves engaging multiple stakeholders to explain their competing views of complete problems, integrating these diverse perspectives, supporting people to solve the problem and committing to a compelling vision of the future.

Our application of a systems thinking approach has generated new insights into the effectiveness of the homelessness service system through a focus on the levers that can create influence. Using a formal systems thinking approach to examine how homelessness service systems work, and whether they are effective, is innovative for Australia. A systems thinking approach has much to offer the understanding of how to address homelessness because it acknowledges that complex social problems (or 'wicked problems') are issues that affect the social and human experience where cause and effect and solutions are not clear or linear. Factors in regard to how the problem manifests, is understood and addressed are multiple and interwoven. As a result, there is no one clear, evident solution; different stakeholders often consider, understand and address the problem differently (OECD 2017; Abercrombie, Harries et al. 2015; Greenwood and Suddaby 2006; AIHW 2017). Further, because it is complex and emergent, impacts can be difficult (sometimes impossible) to observe, determine and attribute (OECD 2017). Therefore, it is known that to create interventions and policies to address these complex social problems, no single organisation or intervention can tackle it alone (OECD 2017; Abercrombie, Harries et al. 2015). A complex social problem therefore requires a sophisticated understanding and a collection of actors, actions and interventions to address it thoroughly and effectively.

This makes systems thinking a useful conceptual tool to understand and respond to complex social problems. “A system is a configuration of interactive, interdependent parts that are connected through a web of relationships, forming a whole that is greater than the sum of its parts” (Holland, cited in Abercrombie, Harries et al. 2015: 6). Systems contain sub-systems and other self-reinforcing or feedback relationships between the parts. They have a range of properties, including:

- multiple components, both tangible (e.g. people and agents, resources and services) and intangible (e.g. relationships, values and perceptions)
- interdependent and connected parts that are constantly changing and adjusting, thereby affecting each other
- nested systems and sub-systems
- self-reinforcing processes or relationships which aim towards stability and equilibrium
- resistance to change
- counter-intuitive relationships and feedback loops (i.e. cause and effects may appear disconnected or distant)
- emergent and self-organising (there may be non-linear relationships between components)
- exist within an environment with which they interact, which make them sensitive to the specific context in which they evolve (Abercrombie, Harries et al. 2015; OECD 2017; Kim 1999; Kim 2000; Auspos and Cabaj 2014; Best and Holmes 2010).

Seeing a complex social problem as a system allows an organising structure for understanding its multiple components and the relationships between them. Notably, systems that are social in nature are particularly hard to understand, as not all motivations of the actors within them, or aspects of their internal structure, will be self-evident; it is therefore easy to take action on a complex social issue without understanding the impact that action will have within the full system of the issue at hand, which may have unintended consequences (Kim 1999; Kim 2000).

Systems thinking is a method through which to unpack and better understand the complex social problem to be solved. It involves a depth of understanding of the context of the problem (including root causes), the relationships within the ecosystem that affect the problem, determining the key actions or interventions (levers) for change and by whom (agents), understanding intended and unintended consequences (or feedback loops); and ultimately addressing (or begin to address) these issues by reconfiguring how some services operate and connecting services and supports across different sectors that currently tend to operate in silos (Maani and Cavana 2007; Abercrombie, Harries et al. 2015; Kim 1999; OECD 2017; Sterman 2000).

Homelessness is a complex social problem, which has no simple linear solution and therefore requires a complex response. Within this complex response will be both simple and complicated problems that need to be solved. Nonetheless, the need for an effective functioning of homelessness services commonly cuts across and emerges from the intersection of a range of other social issue areas. For example, as acknowledged in the formulation of this Inquiry and in other recent research, homelessness and the services used to address it are commonly intricately connected with areas such as socio-economic disadvantage, mental health, disability, domestic violence, veterans affairs, trauma, and cultural and other types of disadvantage (MacKenzie, Flatau et al. 2016; Flatau, Tyson et al. 2018; Baldry and Dowse 2013; AIHW 2017). The experiences of homeless people across different parts of the life course, including youth and old age, also differ (MacKenzie, Flatau et al. 2016; Heaney, Flatau et al. 2017; AIHW 2017). Furthermore, the drivers of, and solutions to homelessness cut across the complex parts of the human services system (Muir, Moran et al. 2017; Muir, Michaux et al. 2018; Sharam, Moran et al. 2018; Heaney, Flatau et al. 2017). They also interface with many other human services, including those that relate to employment, disability, health and mental health, criminal justice and supports to Indigenous communities (Bleasdale 2006; Baldry and Dowse 2013; Heaney, Flatau et al. 2017; AIHW 2017). Therefore, this Inquiry has applied systems thinking (in collaboration with other research methods) in order to assist in determining a more effective homelessness service system.

Indigenous knowledge and research

In academia, concepts of Indigenous knowledge have emerged as a legitimate field of inquiry over the past three decades. Semali and Kincheloe (1999) highlighted the distinction between Western and Indigenous knowledge forms through a connection-fragmentation nexus. Here, Western knowledge concepts that are derivative of Cartesian dualist separations of mind and body tend to categorise and fragment contemporary knowledge into 'disciplines', such as mathematics, science, law, business, and so on. Indigenous knowledge systems, however, are focussed on recognition of connections between humans and our ecosystems - all things. These methods are also embedded in culture, cultural experiences and contexts, and distinguish themselves as 'holistic knowledge' via this inherent connectedness to all things (Battiste 2011; Nakata 2004; Semali and Kincheloe 1999).

Such recognition opens up possibilities and opportunities for research that challenges inherent issues of 'knowledge control' that, according to Agrawal (2005) often results in Indigenous knowledges being rejected and labelled "implausible, subjective and lacking in epistemological integrity" (Moreton-Robinson 2004: 85). Addressing this, a number of scholars espouse the value of 'decolonising' research. This can both improve Indigenous wellbeing and enrich broader research agendas by recognising and valuing Indigenous knowledges, methods, epistemologies and contributions (Tuhiwai Smith 1999; Rigney 2006; Battiste 2011).

Indigenous ways of knowing are grounded in concepts of connection and relationships, and there are opportunities in contemporary research to learn from, and embrace, them.

Such an inclusive research approach fits well in the area of homelessness research, particularly in merging the approaches of systems thinking and Indigenous methods. The systems thinking workshop held in Sydney in October 2018 identified a range of negative feedback loops influencing the homelessness service system and many of the barriers or 'stuck points' to those seeking effective homelessness services in Australia. The identification of levers and actors and agents focussed on how the negative feedback loops can be 'broken' in order to create positive change for the different cohorts. Although at the start of the workshop participants focussed broadly on an overloaded and under-resourced homelessness service system, it was quickly revealed that many of the challenges experienced in the homelessness service system are driven by broader structural inequities and/or barriers within other systems. These, in turn, need to be addressed.

Following the systems thinking workshop, the conceptual link between the systems thinking approach and aspects of Indigenous knowledge and research methodologies was identified. In particular, the 'feedback loops' that recognise the influence of one agent on the behaviour of others, and vice versa, correspond to what is recognised as reflexivity within an Indigenous methodology.

Importantly, the conceptual approach for this Inquiry therefore brought together for the first time Muir's (2018) five principles of systems thinking in conjunction with Peters' (2017) concepts of Indigenous knowledge as a methodology throughout the Inquiry. The correlation between these two ways of thinking are outlined in Table 1.

Relationality and connectedness

A fundamental principle of Indigenous knowledge is the recognition of the relationships and connections between all things. In contrast to Western scientific beliefs of separation of mind, body and our physical environment, Indigenous methods see all aspects of our world (and thus research projects) as relevant and vital agents. Examples can include the two-way connections to land, language, history, people, visions and dreams, animals and the physical environment. This allows us to understand the interconnectedness of systems thinking.

Reflexivity

Research on or about Indigenous peoples should not have an end point, but should become the starting point for a (new) branch of discourse that recognises and respects the other elements of Indigenous knowledge. Researchers should understand and embrace that the knowledge created from a research project, much like Indigenous knowledge, is not only contextual (as within our Western paradigm it is required to address a specific research question or problem), but is fluid and changing, reflecting and informing the environment in which it was created. It remains connected to not only the researchers involved, but also to the stakeholders who may have commissioned it, the communities it addresses, and the audience who read its results. It satisfies administrative and funding requirements of Western education and policy, but also informs colleagues, students, communities and families of new knowledge. This new knowledge then informs new generations, and prompts new questions and crucial inquiry. Much like the feedback loops of systems thinking, reflexivity influences future behaviours of those involved in the research.

The priority here, though, is ensuring that the Indigenous community(ies) involved are kept up-to-date and informed, and are free to express concerns, doubts, worries and successes. Indigenous research enters the realm of the Indigenous world, where all things are connected, and fundamental concepts of respect, caring and sharing remain at the fore. As such, research relationships remain ongoing and fluid, and must always privilege community benefit above individual, academic achievement.

Mutual sharing and reciprocity

Similarly to the way that reflexivity encompasses the feedback of systems thinking, reciprocity allows for deep engagement. Research on Indigenous Australians has long been a one-way process of examination and evaluation. In challenging this, Indigenous methodologies prioritise the mutual benefit of research, and research projects should not begin until the mutual benefit has been identified and articulated. This concept both challenges existing Western research systems of scholarly ownership, and privileges the central role of community in Indigenous knowledge. Reciprocity ensures that any research conduct is fundamentally based upon benefitting Indigenous peoples and communities, and the researchers and their stakeholders.

Context and location specificity

Indigenous cultures all around the world draw strength from the connections they have established with all things. Such things include family and kinship systems, ancestral bloodlines, animals and plants, and spiritual beings. However, arguably the greatest and most important connection is to land and country. Connection to the physical environment is crucial to the fabric of Indigenous culture. For Aboriginal Australian people, these connections remain an essential element of contemporary culture.

Indigenous knowledge, therefore, not only thrives because of relationality to all things, but specifically to land and country. Indigenous knowledge is drawn from, and belongs to, the land from which it emerged. It changes over time according to the changing environmental conditions (Battiste 2002), and so must reflect and remain informed by its environmental context.

Table 1: Indigenous concepts mapped to systems thinking principles

Indigenous concept	Systems thinking principles
Relationality and connectedness	
A fundamental principle of Indigenous knowledge is the recognition of the relationships and connections between all things, including land, language, history, people, visions and dreams, animals and the physical environment.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Independent parts play different roles. • Parts are 'interconnected': they work together and interact in different ways. • The whole is different from the sum of the parts. • Systems like balance.
Reflexivity	
Research on or about Indigenous peoples is a starting point for a (new) branch of discourse that recognises and respects the other elements of Indigenous knowledge (rather than a conclusion). Knowledge created from a research project is fluid and changing and remains connected to <i>all</i> stakeholders. As such, research relationships remain ongoing and fluid, and must always privilege community benefit above individual academic achievement.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Parts are 'interconnected': they work together and interact in different ways. • The whole is different from the sum of the parts. • Feedback loops: the behaviour of one affects its own behaviour and the behaviour of others.
Mutual sharing and reciprocity	
Reciprocity allows for deep engagement, and both challenges existing Western research systems of scholarly ownership, and privileges the central role of community in Indigenous knowledge. Reciprocity ensures that any research conduct is fundamentally based upon benefitting Indigenous peoples and communities, <i>and</i> the researchers and their stakeholders.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Parts are 'interconnected': they work together and interact in different ways. • The whole is different from the sum of the parts. • Feedback loops: the behaviour of one affects its own behaviour and the behaviour of others. • Systems like balance.
Context and location specificity	
Globally, Indigenous cultures maintain strong and vital connections to land and country. Connection to the physical environment is crucial to the fabric of Indigenous culture. Indigenous knowledge is drawn from, and belongs to, the land from which it emerged. It changes over time according to the changing environmental conditions (Battiste 2002), and so must reflect and remain informed by its environmental context.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Parts are 'interconnected': they work together and interact in different ways. • Systems like balance.

Source: Authors.

The Inquiry was driven by these principles as a way of utilising Indigenous and Western knowledge and research methodologies, and acknowledging how both can exist, inform and complement each other to ensure a robust, authentic and fruitful process. This has implications for the quality of the findings of this research, but also has the potential to be used very effectively in other homelessness and housing research projects in the future.

In each of the projects, this combination of systems thinking and Indigenous methods was utilised to varying degrees. For example, in each case where 'focus group' or 'roundtable' discussions were conducted, elements of what we can consider Indigenous methods were also employed. Allowing all participants to tell their own narrative – their story – locates them within the project. These 'stories' become an important part of the data collection process, and thus the research itself. Storytelling has long been a vital part of Indigenous knowledge transfer, and we can see the links to contemporary research.

Also, altering the 'labels' of the project – using a phrase such as 'yarning circle' instead of 'focus group' or 'roundtable discussion', removed a layer of colonialism from the project itself, and allowed a recognition and acceptance of Indigenous methods into the Inquiry.

1.2.2 What is a homelessness service system?

The idea of a system is widely used to conceptualise relations, processes and interactions and equilibria in nature, as well as human created organisational and social systems. Examples include education systems, health systems and services systems such as the homelessness service system.

Actors and lever points in a homelessness service system

In Figure 5, we outline the major actors and lever points in the homelessness service system. The major actors within the homelessness service system are:

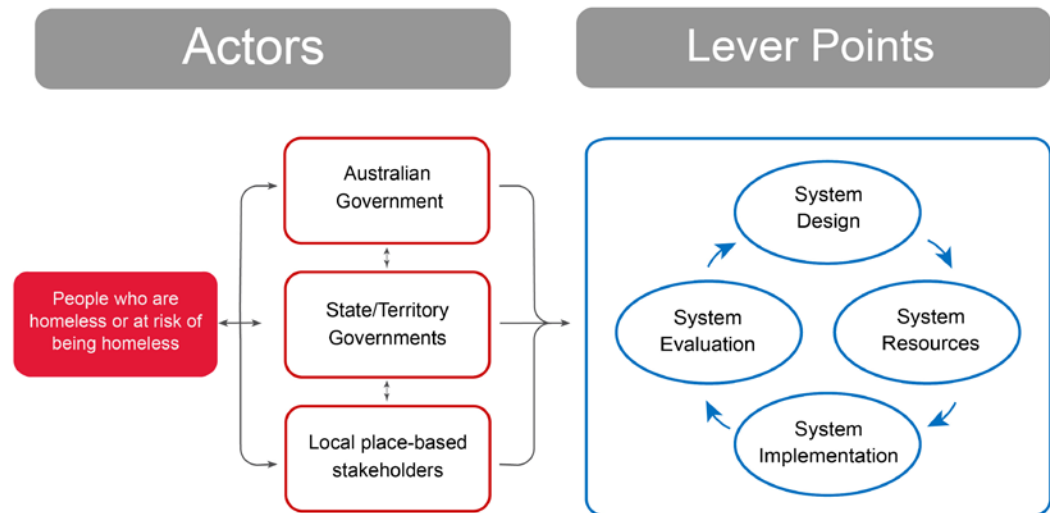
- people who are homeless or at risk of homelessness – their needs shape the homelessness service system, in particular income support, housing and support services. They are the beneficiaries of the homelessness service system and their input into the design of service system is important
- the Australian Government, which plays a major role in providing resources and establishing objectives
- state and territory governments, which play a major role in developing strategies, and providing and distributing funding to services
- local place-based stakeholders such as SHSs, mainstream services (like schools and health services), local governments and local communities.

Each actor, depending upon their role and position within the homelessness service system, can lever change within the service system at a number of points:

- system design, where actors envision a homelessness service system, develop objectives, policies and strategies, work out the roles of the different actors, and establish output and outcome measures
- system resources, where actors commit funds, know-how, training and skill development to build capacity within organisations to respond to homelessness
- system implementation, which establishes linkages between structures and organisations for the delivery of services
- system evaluation, where the existing system design, system resources and system implementation are evaluated and new learnings are fed back into these elements of the system.

As this report unfolds, we draw upon this broad framework of actors and lever points to propose a potential reconfiguration of the Australian homelessness service system. Figure 8 (in Section 4.2.3) illustrates in more detail potential lever points and actors, including a move towards homelessness prevention, Housing First, a proposed alliance between government and purchased services, and a 'duty to assist' role for universal welfare services.

Figure 5: Actors and lever points in the homelessness service system



Source: Authors.

The homelessness service system is not just specialist homelessness services

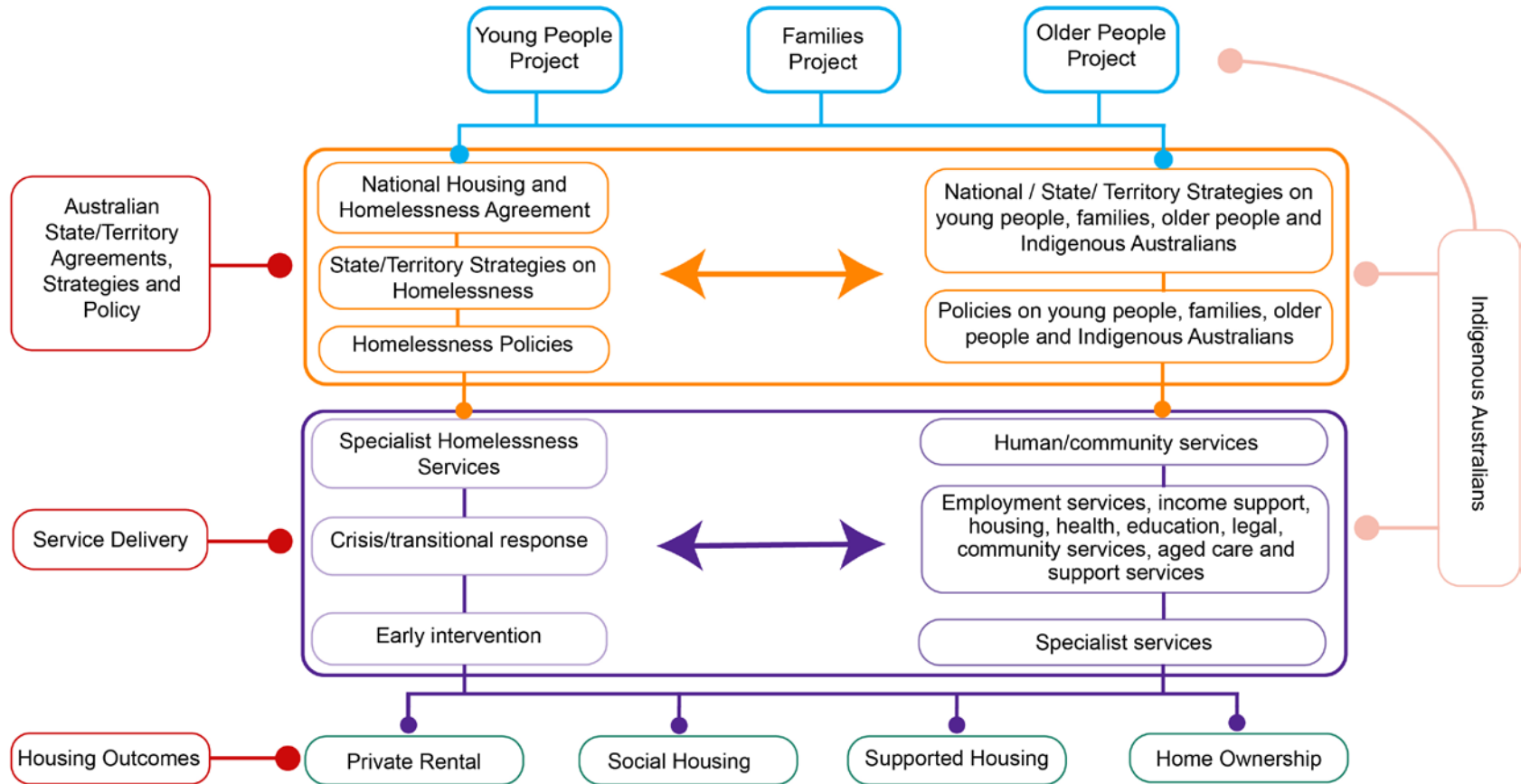
Figure 5 presents a general overview of the actors. However, it is important to note that these actors have a broad role that extends beyond the homelessness service system. In addition, they have a role in the homelessness service system that extends beyond the narrow confines of SHSs. It is this broader understanding that informs this Inquiry.

Figure 6 illustrates the initial policy and practice framework that guided our investigation of the existing national homelessness service system. Our Inquiry initially focussed on three stages of the life course: young people, families, and older people.

In part, the homelessness service system in Australia consists of policies and the administration of funding contracts for supported accommodation services provided by some 1,500 SHSs in the eight Australian jurisdictions. The National Housing and Homelessness Agreement (NHHA) (2018) is the overarching agreement through which the Australian Government and state and territory governments share funding and agree outcomes for the provision of these services.

Some agencies other than SHSs provide services needed by people to avoid homelessness, assist them while they experience homelessness and support their recovery from homelessness. A core contention of this Inquiry is that thinking about systems and system redesign needs to have a scope broader than simply a focus on changes to the SHS system. Figure 6 outlines the role of different actors in the design, resourcing and implementation of SHSs but also the relationships between specific homelessness policies, strategies and services and more general policies, strategies and services.

Figure 6: Initial policy and practice framework of the homelessness service system



Source: Authors.

A client-centred approach leads to the idea that a 'system', in this case a homelessness service system, consists of interacting parts – interventions, programs and institutions that affect the homelessness and are in turn affected by these people. This includes services and agencies outside of the SHS system. Some policy settings for some cohorts at risk of homelessness or experiencing homelessness require national policies, strategies and funding regarding commitments. This includes investment in social housing, income support and benefits, and aged care community housing programs. This broader policy and practice framework of the homelessness service system guided the Inquiry. It served two ends:

- a framework for a comprehensive mapping of the current broader homelessness service system in Australia
- a framework for thinking about the policy and practice proposals considered later in this report for a homelessness service system reconfiguration that would improve the linkages and ways of working between different parts of the currently siloed homelessness service system. These linkages include not only SHSs, but also the planning and delivery of other mainstream human services to prevent and assess homelessness.

In the following chapters, we explain how our research repeatedly revealed the need for the homelessness service system to encompass mainstream human and welfare agencies and to enable them to have roles in assessing, preventing, intervening and assisting their clients who are homeless or at risk of homelessness. Later, in Chapter 4, Figure 7 illustrates a proposal to reconfigure the institutional structure of the homelessness service system, including:

- a new, integrated national homelessness initiative
- a move away from provision of crisis accommodation to the prevention of homelessness and Housing First schemes
- new cross-sectoral partnership funding arrangements
- an enhanced role for universal welfare services in their 'duty to assist'.

1.3 Policy context

1.3.1 Homeless persons are not just rough sleepers

In 2012, the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) developed a statistical definition of homelessness. Under this definition, people are considered homeless when they do not have suitable accommodation, or if their current housing arrangement is inadequate, they have no tenure, the lease is not extendable, or the conditions of their dwelling limit their control of and access to space for social relations (ABS 2012). This definitional change has impacted the policy context in Australia because it means that crowding is now considered a form of homelessness. This increased the numbers of people who are now included as experiencing homelessness, and also highlighted the extent of crowding in households in Australia, particularly for Indigenous Australians living in remote areas.

Rough sleepers

Only approximately 5 per cent of homeless people in Australia are rough sleeping, although it is rough sleepers that many Australians think about when they consider homelessness. Many people who are sleeping rough have severe mental health conditions or substance abuse problems.

1.3.2 Specialist homelessness services

Through national intergovernmental agreements, Australian governments fund over 1,500 SHSs that provide a range of services to support people who are homeless or at risk of homelessness (Brackertz, Fotheringham et al. 2016). These services are delivered by non-government organisations including agencies specialising in delivering services to specific target groups (such as people escaping domestic and family violence), as well as those that provide more generic services to people facing housing crises. SHSs support those who have become homeless and those who are at imminent risk of homelessness (Spinney and Zirakbash 2017).

Remarkably, there is not a current national homelessness strategy. In Australia, most of the funding for SHSs is derived from the NHHA, which commenced in July 2018. The NHHA recognises that the Commonwealth and the states and territories hold a mutual interest in improving housing outcomes across the housing spectrum, including outcomes for Australians who are homeless or at risk of homelessness, and the need to work together to achieve those outcomes (Council on Federal Financial Relations 2018).

The NHHA is aligned with the *National Plan to Reduce Violence against Women and their Children 2010–2022* (COAG 2010) in that it takes a more gendered lens to violence against women and children when compared with previous homelessness policies, such as *The Road Home* (Commonwealth of Australia 2008).

The objective of the NHHA is to contribute to improving access to affordable, safe and sustainable housing across the housing spectrum, including measures to prevent and address homelessness, and to support social and economic participation. Several national priority cohorts are specifically identified in the NHHA and are expected to be addressed in each jurisdiction's homelessness strategy (Council on Federal Financial Relations 2018):

- women and children affected by DFV
- children and young people
- Indigenous Australians
- people experiencing repeat homelessness
- people exiting institutions and care into homelessness
- older people.

The NHHA is a Council of Australian Governments (COAG) Commonwealth, state and territory funding agreement that is operationalised differently in different places in Australia. This, in turn, means that the homelessness service system differs in different locations and by other local policies, services and supports outside of the traditional homelessness service system. Together, these policies and strategies provide a context within which SHSs deliver crisis response, early intervention, homelessness prevention and specialist support to people who are homeless or facing homelessness. The reliance on SHSs means that most support is intended to address individual risk factors rather than structural drivers of homelessness. It also means that most services are crisis-driven rather than providing homelessness prevention and early intervention services. An additional consequence is that other mainstream human service agencies are excluded from playing a more effective role in dealing with homelessness.

In terms of state-specific priority policy reform areas, the National Affordable Housing Agreement (NAHA) focuses on three key areas for reform (Council on Federal Financial Relations 2018: 17):

1. achieving better outcomes for people, setting out how the desired outcomes for individuals will be measured, which may include a focus on priority groups, and economic and social participation
2. early intervention and prevention, including through mainstream services, setting out actions being taken through homelessness services and mainstream services, which may include a focus on particular client groups or services
3. commitment to service program and design that is evidence- and research-based, which shows what evidence and research was used to design responses to homelessness, and how responses and strategies will be evaluated.

1.4 Existing research

Poverty is a root cause of homelessness for all age groups and genders. Having a lower income than needed to sustain a decent, healthy and secure life creates a marginal position in the housing market that can result in the loss of accommodation and a precarious existence (Thredgold, Beer et al. 2016). In a previous AHURI report, Johnson, Scutella et al. (2015: 32) found that the 'the state of the housing market appears to have an association with homelessness'. They also noted that the risk factors for homelessness are multi-dimensional and include both structural and individual drivers.

Wood, Batterham et al. (2015) found that risk factors are also affected by geography. The levels of homelessness are higher in regions with higher income inequality, with higher-density dwellings, and with a higher proportion of men, sole parents and Indigenous Australians. As noted by Brackertz, Fortheringham et al. (2016: 11, 4), while 'optimal homelessness responses should address both individual and structural risk factors', there is 'no overarching national plan to address homelessness that takes into account structural drivers'.

Homelessness services have evolved over the past 50 or more years. In 1984, a range of programs were consolidated in the Supported Accommodation Assistance Program (SAAP) and this program has undergone a series of transformations (Chesterman 1988; Erebus Consulting Partners 2004). Despite the effectiveness of homelessness services and their transformation over time, the existing system does not meet the demand for services, nor reduce the number of homeless people. The success of homelessness services depends on a range of factors. A review of the literature in relation to young homeless people by Barker, Humphries et al. (2012: 26) indicates some factors that support long-term sustainable services. These may be important not only for those services directed at young homeless people but, with some adaptation, may be more generally applicable:

- systematic coordination of services
- involvement of services, including education, that work with vulnerable young people
- collaboration and cooperation between government and community organisations
- voluntary partnerships across services
- comprehensive protocols for data collection and sharing to inform comprehensive service delivery
- identification of preferred outcomes for young people
- inclusion and participation of young people in planning and decision-making
- investment in workforce development.

We found only one study that specifically reviewed the current status of Australian homelessness services as a system. Although, many Australian studies have investigated the many issues surrounding:

- the definition and counting of homelessness (e.g. Chamberlain and MacKenzie 1992; 2008; MacKenzie 2012; ABS 2012)
- the causes of homelessness (e.g. Johnson and Jacobs 2014)
- homeless careers (e.g. MacKenzie and Chamberlain 2003)
- the costs of homelessness (e.g. Zaretsky and Flatau 2013; MacKenzie and Thielking 2013; Wood, Flatau et al. 2016)
- the funding of homelessness services (e.g. Flatau, Zaretsky et al. 2016; Spinney, Habibi et al. 2016; MacKenzie, McNelis et al. 2017)
- the relationship between homelessness and mental health, drug and alcohol addiction and DFV (e.g. Costello, Thomson and Jones 2013; Flatau, Conroy et al. 2010; Breckenridge, Chung et al. 2016; Spinney 2012; Flanagan, Blunden et al. 2019)

- the relationship between homelessness and housing (e.g. AIHW 2015; Wood, Flatau et al. 2016); homelessness programs and services (e.g. Phillips and Parsell 2012)
- the services required to meet the needs of people who are homeless or at risk of homelessness (e.g. Parsell, Moutou et al. 2015).

The 2016 AHURI study we identified (Brackertz, Fotheringham et al. 2016) outlined two sets of indicators for evaluating the effectiveness of a homelessness service system: client outcomes and system outcomes. These are presented Table 2.

Table 2: Indicators of system effectiveness

Type of outcome	Indicator
Client outcomes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Housing status – fewer homeless after support • Education, training and employment status • Social inclusion status • Received multiple support periods
System outcomes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cost effectiveness • Level of unmet demand for services • Targeting of priority groups • Prioritisation of early intervention and prevention • System integration • Reduction in the number and rate of homeless people

Source: Brackertz, Fotheringham et al. 2016: 6.

Brackertz, Fotheringham et al. (2016) made an assessment of the Australian homelessness service system against these indicators. Against the client outcomes, they concluded that the homelessness service system had improved on housing status and education, training and employment status; there was a lack of data to assess whether social inclusion status had changed; and there was no change in the number of support periods received by homeless persons. Against the system outcomes, they concluded that homelessness services were cost-effective; that there had been no change in the level of unmet demand for services; that targeting of priority groups had improved; and that the number and rate of homeless people was higher. Notably, due to the lack of data, the study could not assess whether early intervention and prevention were prioritised, nor could it assess whether the system was effectively integrated.

Significantly, the study also noted ‘the need for greater involvement of mainstream agencies (e.g. housing, health, justice, education, employment) in early intervention and prevention of homelessness for at risk groups’ (Brackertz, Fotheringham et al. 2016: v). This sentiment echoes the previous National Partnership Agreement on Homelessness (COAG 2015: 6):

“A better connected service system is a key to achieving long-term sustainable reductions in the number of people who are homeless. This Agreement acknowledges that providing emergency and transitional housing is not the sole rationale for the service system. Reforms to the service system will build more connected, integrated and responsive services which achieve sustainable housing, and improve economic and social participation of those at risk of homelessness. Improved links between homelessness services, and between homelessness services and mainstream services, will improve outcomes for individuals, reduce duplicate processing across agencies, and enable faster transition from temporary accommodation for the homeless to stable housing. Improved integration of homelessness services, employment and training providers and Centrelink will lift economic and social participation outcomes for people who are homelessness.”

1.5 Research methods

This Inquiry comprised an overall inquiry focussed on broad research questions, and three projects focussed on particular groups of homeless people: young people, families, and older people.

1.5.1 The Inquiry research questions

The Inquiry addressed the overall research question:

How can the homelessness service system be redesigned and implemented to be effective for different groups across the life course?

The research undertaken in this Inquiry and the chapters of this report are based on the three supporting research questions:

1. What can we learn from national and international homelessness service systems for the future?
2. What are the key levers for creating an effective homelessness service system?
 - regarding the balance of early intervention, prevention and crisis provision?
 - regarding funding and commissioning arrangements of Specialist Homelessness Services?
 - regarding the relationships between specialist and mainstream services?
3. How might Australia reconfigure our homelessness service system in order to effectively support the prevention and minimisation of homelessness across the life course?

1.5.2 Inquiry projects

Each of the three Inquiry projects examined the Australian homelessness service system from the perspective of a different group of homeless people, and all focussed on the particular needs of Indigenous Australians. In seeking to answer the overall Inquiry research question, each project had its own set of research questions (see Table 3). A synthesis of the findings from the projects and from our Inquiry level systems workshop is outlined in Table 4 and Table 5 in Chapter 2.

Table 3: Sub-project research questions, methods and outputs

Research questions	Methods	Outputs
Redesign of a homelessness service system for young people		
<p>RQ1: How might policy decision-makers go about rebalancing the support system for vulnerable young people to significantly expand early intervention and post-homelessness rapid rehousing and supported housing for young people?</p> <p>RQ2: What changes to housing agreements and policies, as well as income and employment support policies and practices, would be needed to redress the current issues young people have in accessing and maintaining affordable housing options (affordability being relative to the prevailing income levels of unemployed, disadvantaged and homeless young people)?</p> <p>RQ3: If education and training and vocationally relevant skills are vital for young people to achieve a sustainable livelihood, how can the education and employment support systems and the community services and homelessness service systems be better integrated systemically to reduce the cohort of disadvantaged and/or homeless individuals into the future and across the life course?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Community-level system analysis comprising: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • analysis of local client data • interviews with key local informants • interviews with departmental officers responsible for homelessness funding. • Discussions with key international youth homelessness informants • Discussions with Indigenous workers and Indigenous-specific organisations 	<p>MacKenzie, D., Hand, T., Zufferey, Ca., McNelis, S., Spinney, A. and Tedmanson, D. (2020) <i>Redesign of a Homelessness Service System for Young People</i>, AHURI Final Report No. 327, Australian Housing and Urban Research Institute, Melbourne, https://www.ahuri.edu.au/research/final-reports/327, doi:10.18408/ahuri-5119101</p>

Research questions	Methods	Outputs
A homelessness service system to support families		
<p>RQ1: How is integrated early intervention and prevention working in practice? What is working well, what needs improvement, and what are the opportunities for significant systemic changes?</p> <p>RQ2: How effectively are existing arrangements providing support to families who are most at risk of homelessness? What opportunities exist for these arrangements to be reshaped to improve outcomes?</p> <p>RQ3: What lessons can be learnt from how homelessness service systems in other countries conceptualise, design and deliver support to families?</p> <p>RQ4: What are the best ways to understand and measure change for families receiving support from the homelessness service system? What data systems, outcomes measures, and theories of change should underpin interventions for families?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Review of peer-reviewed literature on: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • intervention outcomes from homelessness and family support service systems in other countries • principles behind policy design and delivery interventions. • Metropolitan and regional policy and practice roundtables in three jurisdictions – New South Wales, South Australia and Victoria – with participants from SHSs, mental health, family support, DFV services, welfare services and government agencies • Interviews with policy and data stakeholders 	<p>valentine, k., Blunden, H., Zufferey, C., Spinney, A. and Zirakbash, F. (2020) <i>Supporting Families Effectively through the Homelessness Services System</i>, AHURI Final Report No. 330, Australian Housing and Urban Research Institute, Melbourne, https://www.ahuri.edu.au/research/final-reports/330, doi:10.18408/ahuri-7119201</p>
An effective homelessness service system for older Australians		
<p>RQ1: What is the appropriate balance between early intervention, prevention and crisis services for older people who are homeless, and between specialist and mainstream services, in order to provide the most efficient and effective response to this group's needs?</p> <p>RQ2: What is the relationship between the contemporary nature of homelessness and specialist and mainstream services, how do these arrangements relate to the wider health and human services systems, and what could be done to maximise outcomes for older Australians at risk of homelessness?</p> <p>RQ3: What lessons can be learned from how homelessness service systems overseas deliver homelessness services to older people?</p> <p>RQ4: What are the impacts of system design characteristics, such as funding and commissioning arrangements, and cross-governmental integration on system adaptability and effectiveness when dealing with older Australians at risk of homelessness?</p> <p>RQ5: What are the best ways to understand and measure changes in effectiveness of the homelessness service system for older Australians? What would appropriate outcome measures look like?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • An extensive review of the academic and policy literature • An online survey of those working in the sector • Two focus groups in Melbourne • A yarning circle in Darwin 	<p>Thredgold, C., Beer, A., Zufferey, C., Peters, A. and Spinney, A. (2019) <i>An effective homelessness services system for older Australians</i>, AHURI Final Report No. 322, Australian Housing and Urban Research Institute, Melbourne, https://www.ahuri.edu.au/research/final-reports/322, doi:10.18408/ahuri-7318601</p>

Source: Authors.

1.5.3 The Inquiry

The Inquiry unfolded in seven stages.

Stage 1: The Inquiry leadership team developed the analytical and methodological framework for the Inquiry.

Stage 2: A systems thinking workshop was held with key invited stakeholders from a range of organisations (including Indigenous organisations) to brainstorm, debate and hypothesise about the homelessness service system. This exercise identified the key actors and agents, feedback loops and levers in the system, how service provision is operationalised on the ground, how system elements interact and some intended and unintended consequences of the current system (and for whom), and included some discussion of how the system might be redesigned or modified to achieve better outcomes. This was fundamental work that helped inform an understanding about what is effective (i.e. producing the desired effect) and ineffective (i.e. not producing the desired effect) in the current Australian homelessness service system. This work also allowed the research team to identify the role of Indigenous methodology in not only specific aspects of each project, but the inquiry methodology as a whole.

Stages 3–5: Each of the three projects leveraged off this work to provide more evidence for four specific groups: young people, families and children, older people, and Indigenous Australians. By using different methods, these contributed to a coherent examination of the overarching Inquiry research questions:

- *Redesign of a homelessness service system for young people* examined community-level service systems as experienced by homeless young people (aged up to 25) on issues such as effectiveness, balance, funding arrangements and integration from a perspective of system redesign potential.
- *A homelessness service system to support families* investigated the interactions of housing and other support services for families in different circumstances, with a particular focus on groups of families that are most at risk.
- *An effective homelessness service system for older Australians* included an online survey of management and frontline staff in organisations, and two co-production workshops with participants in the aged care sector around the key issues and challenges in moving towards an effective homelessness service system for older Australians.

Stage 6: This comprised the second AHURI Panel Meeting held in October 2019 to discuss and receive feedback on our preliminary findings.

Stage 7: This Final Report integrates the analytic and methodological mapping work of Stages 1 and 2 with the supporting project findings and Inquiry Panel feedback. In this report we have brought together our findings from all our research methods in order to answer the Inquiry research questions.

Chapters 2, 3 and 4 each address our three research questions, which are detailed in Section 1.4. In Chapter 5, we concisely present policy development options to enable Australia to move towards an effective homelessness service system that has the potential to contribute to ending homelessness in Australia.

2. What are key levers for creating an effective homelessness service system?

- **The existing Australian homelessness service system is largely crisis-oriented. A major reform is to reorient the overall response towards prevention and early intervention, as well as rapid rehousing and support.**
- **Fieldwork found the following key levers for creating an effective balance of early intervention, prevention and crisis services:**
 - looking beyond SHSs and making changes to other interrelated service systems
 - providing more long-term affordable housing so people can move more quickly from crisis and transitional accommodation into stable living situations
 - rapidly rehousing affected individuals and families, particularly young people, for whom social housing options are scarce, in order to minimise the duration of their experience of homelessness
 - undertaking assertive outreach in order to reach people at risk of homelessness
 - ensuring both person-centred and place-based approaches to service delivery.

- **Achieving interagency collaboration and co-location of services as well as collaboration between different sectors and, better integration SHSs and other service providers. Fieldwork highlighted the importance of recognising the particular cultural needs of Indigenous Australians – and ensuring that Indigenous communities are included in the planning, provision and delivery of services and responses to homelessness.**
- **Fieldwork identified some important examples of collaboration and integration already operating in the Australian homelessness service system. These should be supported and expanded.**

Levers can be defined as actions or interventions that actors can put in place to break negative feedback loops and prompt change in how a system functions (Maani & Cavana 2007). The actors or agents within a system are the people or organisations who have the capacity to either progress, or block, change (Abercrombie, Harries et al. 2015).

In this Chapter, we discuss aspects of the current homelessness service system, the barriers to change within this system and potential levers within the current system for creating an effective homelessness service system. Section 2.2 discusses the state/territory homelessness strategies focusing on initiatives that might point to a way forward. Section 2.3 draws on the findings of our fieldwork to identify key levers in the Australian homelessness service system. Section 2.4 focuses on some Australian examples of collaboration and integration of services which point a way forward.

2.1 Background

Homelessness is a complex social problem (Brown, Keast et al. 2009). Fowler, Hovmand et al. (2019: 465) describe it as 'an enduring public health challenge throughout the developed world'. It is a problem which has no clear linear solution and therefore requires a multi-faceted response (OECD 2017; Abercrombie, Harries et al. 2015). Within this complex response there is a need to address simple and complicated problems regarding both housing supply and homelessness service systems.

Homelessness and the need for an effective functioning of homelessness services commonly cut across and emerge from the intersection of a range of other social issue areas. For example, homelessness and the services used to address it are commonly intricately connected with areas such as socio-economic disadvantage, mental health, disability, domestic violence, veterans' affairs, trauma and cultural and other types of disadvantage (MacKenzie, Flatau et al. 2016; Flatau, Tyson et al. 2018; Baldry and Dowse 2013; AIHW 2017). The experiences of homeless people across different parts of the life course, including youth and old age, also differ (MacKenzie, Flatau et al. 2016; Heaney, Flatau et al. 2017; AIHW 2017). Furthermore, the drivers of and solutions to homelessness cut across the human services system, including early intervention, prevention and crisis services; current and potential funding and commissioning models for social and affordable housing (Muir, Moran et al. 2017; Muir, Michaux et al. 2018; Sharam, Moran et al. 2018; Heaney, Flatau et al. 2017); and the interface with many other human services, including those that relate to employment, disability, health and mental health, criminal justice and supports to Indigenous communities (Bleasdale 2006; Baldry and Dowse 2013; Heaney, Flatau et al. 2017; AIHW 2017).

Homelessness and the need for homelessness services can commonly result when other human service areas fail beneficiaries or when beneficiaries fall between siloed services. Homelessness and the functioning of homelessness services can be considered an emergent phenomenon resulting from this complexity. It is therefore a complex social problem that is greater than the sum of these parts. It is constantly evolving as the other parts of the service system change (OECD 2017; Greenwood & Suddaby 2006). Given homelessness's large reach across different social issues and the large number of people involved, there is unlikely to be a singular understanding among these multiple stakeholders of how to fully identify, observe, understand, measure or address it (OECD 2017). Additional complexity arises when the multiple organisations that need to work together may not always agree on how to do so (OECD 2017; Abercrombie, Harries et al. 2015).

2.2 State/territory homelessness strategies

Most Australian states and territories have strategies for assisting people who are homeless. These have different foci, but most demonstrate an understanding of the importance of prevention and early intervention, and a move away from crisis-led responses.

2.2.1 Victoria

The Victorian Homelessness 2020 Strategy (Victorian Government 2010) aims to change homelessness policy and service delivery to achieve tangible and lasting outcomes. The strategy commits to preventing and minimising the consequences of homelessness and helping people to not become homeless again.

The Victorian Government's strategy focuses on:

1. early intervention and prevention of homelessness
2. recognition and delivery of different services to people in various life stages
3. a systematic approach that considers housing, education and employment, health services and income support with homelessness
4. developing a workforce that is able to intervene and help people in different life stages with relevant homelessness services and achieve best possible outcomes for their clients.

Selected initiatives

The strategy includes the following initiatives (Victorian Government 2010: 11):

- The Safe at Home initiative helps women and children experiencing family violence to remain in the family home, and stay connected to their school and community. This program involves coordinated action by the courts, police and community agencies to ensure the home is safe and free from harassment.
- The Prison Exit Program is a joint initiative of Corrections Victoria and the Department of Human Services, which places women and men exiting prison into transitional housing with the support they need to find long-term housing and to re-establish themselves in the community, reducing rates of recidivism.
- Youth Foyer is an iconic accommodation and support program for young people, providing secure accommodation and case management, including mentoring and support to build life skills (such as budgeting and cooking), recreation programs, training and employment. Ladder, a joint venture between the AFL Players' Association and the AFL Foundation, is an example of Youth Foyer.

2.2.2 New South Wales

The NSW Homelessness Strategy 2018–2023 (NSW Government 2019: 29–31) establishes three focus areas:

1. prevention and early intervention of homelessness, including:
 - increasing early identification of at-risk groups
 - supporting people to maintain their tenancies and avoiding entering the homelessness service system
 - preventing exits from government services into homelessness
2. better access to homelessness support and services, including:
 - expanding supports in New South Wales to reduce rough sleeping and prevent chronic homelessness
 - providing targeted housing options to prevent homelessness or chronic homelessness for high risk cohorts
 - providing choice and the right supports for people to address the issues putting them at risk of homelessness and to reduce repeat homelessness

3. an integrated, person-centred system, including:
 - improving accountability by agencies and services for homelessness outcomes in order to drive systemic change
 - increasing service integration and collaboration to enhance person-centred responses
 - improving services by increasing trauma informed care and culturally appropriate practice.

Selected initiatives

The strategy includes the following initiatives (NSW Government 2019: 7, 9):

- Rent Choice is a time-limited private rental subsidy for up to three years and facilitates access to support services, including training and employment opportunities, to build capacity for independent living.
- Staying Home Leaving Violence supports people experiencing domestic violence to stay safely in their own home.
- Through Supported Students, Successful Students, the Department of Education is providing funding to help schools support vulnerable young people to help them develop their character and wellbeing, and stay engaged with learning.

2.2.3 Queensland

The Queensland Government 'locks in five year funding to give existing service providers and their workforce the certainty and stability they need to continue to deliver vital support services and to drive innovation and transformation' (Queensland Government 2018). The Government maximises its investment in early intervention and innovative supportive housing responses to help Queenslanders sustain their tenancies and transition to independence, and 'will partner for impact to deliver strong and sustainable outcomes for Queenslanders, by coming together with homelessness services and other sectors to address the complex and interconnected nature of homelessness' (Queensland Government 2018: 2).

Selected initiatives

The Queensland approach includes:

- Youth Mobile Support services
- Youth CONNECT Social Benefit Bond
- a shelter for women and children escaping domestic and family violence in Coen
- a new HomeStay Support service in Logan
- services under the GC2018 Commonwealth Games Homelessness Action Plan, piloting models such as the Advance to Zero housing program to inform future statewide responses.

2.2.4 South Australia

The South Australian Government has acknowledged the depth and breadth of challenges in social housing and homelessness across the state. It has looked to introduce changes that take a whole-of-systems approach to housing and homelessness. Key actions have included:

- announcing in 2019 a \$450 million investment into affordable housing that will build additional stock and create opportunities for low income home buyers. It is anticipated that this initiative, alongside innovative financing through HomeStart finance, will free up social housing stock, effectively clearing a 'choke point' in homeless persons gaining access to a home
- the creation of an Office of Homeless Sector Integration, embedded within the South Australian Housing Authority and with a whole-of-sector agenda for improvement

- the introduction of significant reforms that aim to better provide service to:
 - prevent people from falling into homelessness
 - ensure people get the right support they need, when they need it
 - rapidly rehouse people into safe, stable and long-term housing so they don't cycle in and out of homelessness.

The reforms will focus on prevention and early intervention to break the cycle of homelessness, with the first stage of reform establishing a new consolidated advisory and advocacy service. The Office of Homeless Sector Integration was tasked with leading this reform on behalf of the South Australian Government, with a first priority to deliver \$71.5 million worth of new contracts for SHSs to 2021. These contracts include a commitment to transform service delivery through new partnership and consortium approaches.

The South Australian Government has also called for responses to a tender for the establishment of a consolidated customer advisory and engagement service to inform the reform. This included three-month extensions for Shelter SA, Tenants' Information and Advisory Service (TIAS), Get-A-Place and the Financial Service Clinic. The service will connect services that are complementary in nature and provide organisations the ability to partner in service delivery.

A further priority for the South Australian Government has been to review the gateways to the homelessness service system, to simplify and improve access for customers as a critical first touch point for people who are homeless or at risk of homelessness. Work is underway with the Gateways to examine opportunities on how these could work better, with the results due by the end of 2020.

To oversee the reform, a sector representative group of SHS representatives was established in April 2020.

2.2.5 Western Australia

Western Australia's *10-Year Strategy on Homelessness 2020–2030* (Government of Western Australia 2019) sets out a vision for Western Australia 'where everyone has a safe place to call home and is supported to achieve stable and independent lives'. The strategy aims to 'improve Aboriginal wellbeing, provide safe, secure and stable homes, prevent homelessness and, strengthen and coordinate government's responses and impact' (Government of Western Australia 2019: 7, 8).

Selected initiatives

The strategy includes the following initiatives (Government of Western Australia 2019: 26, 28):

- The Broome Aboriginal Short Stay Accommodation (BASSA) facility opened in 2018 and is available to Aboriginal people needing accommodation in Broome for a short period of time (maximum of 28 days). BASSA provides an important short-term accommodation option for Aboriginal people and families visiting Broome, who may otherwise have no accommodation and end up sleeping rough or staying with family members – potentially increasing overcrowding or putting pressure on tenancies.
- Wongee Mia supports Aboriginal people who are chronic rough sleepers experiencing intergenerational homelessness, trauma and poverty. This action learning project by Ruah Community Services works in partnership with a specific family to develop a model that meets their needs. The casework focuses on a single identified individual and expands to support other extended family members who are also homeless, who they have family obligations to and who potentially pose a risk to their tenancy because of their own unmet needs, including homelessness. The work is embedded within the extended family system where outcomes for one person positively affect the rest of the family.

2.2.6 Northern Territory

The *Northern Territory Homelessness Strategy 2018–2023* (Northern Territory Government 2019: 3) aims ‘to improve housing and support outcomes for Territorians who are homeless or at risk of homelessness. The strategy also aims to contribute to increased wellbeing and social inclusion for Territorians experiencing vulnerability. The government aims to do this by building on the strengths of existing services and programs through working closely with service providers and other agencies’.

Selected initiatives

The strategy includes the following initiatives (Northern Territory Government 2019: 14, 18, 26):

- Health patients who travel from remote parts of the Northern Territory often require accommodation assistance for their stay in town. Support for health patients is provided under the Patient Assistance Travel Scheme (PATS). In Darwin and Alice Springs, several SHS providers allocate beds to accommodate PATS patients while they are in town receiving health services.
- The Northern Territory Department of Health, in partnership with the Department of Local Government, Housing and Community Development, has established a trial program to operate initially in the greater Darwin area. The program targets people living in public housing who have a diagnosed mental illness and complex additional support needs. In addition to clinical mental health support, other wrap-around support is provided.
- To increase the number of social housing properties available to Territorians on low incomes and their families, the Department operates a social housing headleasing program. Under the program, long-term leases are offered to property owners. Headleased properties are then sub-leased to Territorians who are eligible for public housing.

2.2.7 Rough sleeper strategies

Some state and territory initiatives have focussed particularly on rough sleepers.

Victoria

Victoria’s homelessness and rough sleeping action plan provides a framework for reducing the incidence and impacts of rough sleeping within the context of four key themes guiding broader homelessness reforms in Victoria (Victorian Government 2018: 11):

1. intervening early to prevent homelessness
2. providing stable accommodation as quickly as possible
3. support to maintain stable accommodation
4. an effective and responsive homelessness service system.

Victoria’s SHSs include assertive outreach, case managed support, brokerage and flexible funding to provide personalised and flexible responses, crisis and transitional accommodation, supportive housing for tenants with complex needs, and help to enter the private housing market through headleasing and private rental assistance (Victorian Government 2018: 10).

The Victorian Government (2018: 14) has “provided \$1.1 million for additional assertive outreach services through the Rough Sleepers Initiative and Melbourne Street to Home. With the additional capacity in the City of Melbourne, assertive outreach teams are actively engaging with around 50 rough sleepers in the central business district each month including many people who have been sleeping rough for an extended period of time. Through persistent engagement and mobile assessment, these responses have assisted more than 185 people into temporary or permanent accommodation since January 2017”.

In January 2017, the Victorian Government (2018: 2) announced a \$9.8 million emergency response package, known as Towards Home, to provide housing and support to people sleeping rough across inner Melbourne. The Towards Home package provided \$5.5 million to establish 30 modular one-bedroom homes to provide supported transitional housing for vulnerable people sleeping rough across inner Melbourne for up to two years. Initiatives to be delivered under the Towards Home program included:

- dedicated access to 40 transitional housing units across metropolitan Melbourne
- 30 new modular and relocatable homes to be established in small clusters on public land
- flexible support packages to provide individualised case management and targeted supports to 40 vulnerable rough sleepers assisted into housing for up to two years.

Victoria has also “invested in a range of measures to help people who are experiencing homelessness to access and maintain private rental accommodation. This includes \$33.2 million ... to expand the Private Rental Assistance Program (building on \$16 million allocated as part of the Family Violence Housing Blitz) to secure housing in the private rental market and provide flexible support to 4,000 vulnerable and disadvantaged clients” (Victorian Government 2018: 19).

Western Australia

The WA Alliance To End Homelessness (WAAEH 2020) comprises a group of individuals and organisations that have come together to end homelessness in Western Australia. Their vision is to end homelessness in Western Australia by 2028.

The Western Australia Strategy to End Homelessness, collectively developed by representatives from homelessness services, people experiencing homelessness, service funders, and members of our community, has the following five key focus areas (WAAEH 2020):

1. housing – ensure adequate and affordable housing
2. prevention – focus on prevention and early intervention
3. strong and coordinated approach – no ‘wrong-door system’
4. data, research and targets – improve data and research, and set clear targets
5. build community capacity – never about us, without us.

In early 2019, the Australian Alliance to End Homelessness brought key representatives from capital cities around Australia to co-invest in learning about, and developing, the ‘Advance to Zero’ approach. Advance to Zero, or ‘Built for Zero’ as it’s known in the United States, is an approach to achieving ‘functional zero’ for rough sleepers in a city or town area using a combination of quality real-time data and service coordination. One of the key tools used in this approach is the ‘By-Name List’. People and organisations working with people experiencing rough sleeping come together to use the list to analyse what is working and to adapt service responses to get better outcomes.

2.3 Identifying key levers in the Australian homelessness service system

Figure 6 illustrates just how complicated the homelessness service system is, and how many types of organisations it encompasses. Key levers that will make the whole homelessness service system more effective have been identified through our research, as well as those actions and changes that are specific to identified client groups. We also discuss our findings about what does not work effectively in the current Australian homelessness service system. Both positive innovations and examples of what is currently ineffective have an important role to play in helping us work in an Australian context to bring about more effective service provision for people who are homeless or facing homelessness.

Different actors and agents seek to make an impact on these homelessness services issues to different extents, and have different capacities, or levels of influence to create change. Where actors both seek change and have a high level of influence, there is greatest scope to take action to enhance the effectiveness of homelessness services.

Throughout the three projects there was not always agreement that many of the actors allocated sufficient priority, or were able to exert sufficient influence, to make real or sustained change. Often those who cared did not have influence and those that had influence had other competing priorities, which meant that they could not always act on homelessness service system issues.

This represents a potential barrier to creating change in homelessness services outcomes for older people, families, young people, and Indigenous people and communities. Often social housing providers and other service providers (e.g. mental health, education, Centrelink) were seen as having the greatest congruence of caring and influence; yet even these actors were constrained by governments, in their capacity as funders and regulators. Further government engagement with 'pulling' many of the levers to create solutions appear to be integral to any resolution to the feedback loops, barriers and 'stuck points' identified. Section 2.2 identifies how South Australia is seeking to address 'stuck points'. We return to this in Chapter 4, where we suggest a potential blueprint for how the Australian homelessness service system might best be reconfigured.

2.3.1 Key levers for creating a balance between early intervention, prevention and crisis services

Despite some innovative prevention and early innovation strategies and projects, in Australia the existing homelessness service system is still mostly orientated towards dealing with crisis through the provision of temporary accommodation. As we see in the next chapter, other countries have managed to reduce homelessness rates by concentrating on preventing homelessness and intervening early before homelessness becomes chronic. In this section, we share more of the levers for creating change revealed through our fieldwork.

These levers can be summarised as follows:

- An important overall finding is that the changes required to create more effective homelessness services go beyond the work of SHSs and include changes in other interrelated service systems, as well as the prevailing culture in society around homelessness and gender.
- We were repeatedly told by the professionals and clients of services that more long-term affordable housing is needed if individuals and families are to be able to prevent themselves from becoming homeless. In addition, SHSs need to have the ability to move people from crisis or transitional accommodation.
- One of the main problems identified in the research was that the homelessness service system is crisis-driven but does not provide rapid rehousing. Early prevention is about redirecting the flow of people into homelessness. For some groups, such as young people, it can be almost impossible to enter social housing. As such, unaffordable and insecure private rental accommodation can be their only post-crisis option. This can cause a cycle of relapse into homelessness. Lack of access to early intervention that does not include the provision of rental income protection for landlords makes it very difficult to prevent the reoccurrence of homelessness. Support is needed to prevent a return to homelessness for many clients of services even after they have been rehoused. Governments and government agencies can create the necessary levers to do this through a national homelessness initiative.
- Assertive outreach is effective in preventing young people, families and older people from losing their homes. This can be achieved by involving mainstream welfare agencies in asking people about their housing security and can include schools, medical services, aged care assessments and Centrelink. It is vital that there is clear transfer of information to relevant agencies, or that the screening agency itself acts on the information received.
- Person-centred, rather than service-centred, approaches were called for by the homeless people we talked to. There are some notable examples of how such work is helping to reduce the numbers of young people becoming homeless in Geelong, Victoria. This is done using a place-based approach, where services work together in the same location.

- Improved data collection and measurement of who is at risk of becoming homeless is needed in order for sufficient early intervention and prevention workers to be available, rather than services becoming involved when crisis accommodation is needed.
- Our research also revealed that in order to be effective, sustained support for families and individuals is needed at all stages, including preventing homelessness from occurring, intervening early once it has occurred, providing crisis and transitional accommodation, and when a long-term housing solution is achieved.
- Despite systemic challenges, local networks and practices of interagency collaboration can work well together to meet families' needs. Agencies reported they worked together to solve problems, drawing on whatever resources were available in the different services. Close relationships between sectors facilitated collaboration.
- Co-location is an effective existing strategy for collaboration, supporting referrals and allowing staff to take clients from one agency to the next.

Participants also said that improved service provision could arise from integrated services that provided:

- models of care based on developing long-term relationships between service providers and homeless persons
- a greater number of service points, and distribution in a variety of locations
- involvement of local government, state housing providers and the local Centrelink office.

2.3.2 Key levers across the life course

Some of the key levers we discovered through our fieldwork are appropriate to all users of the Australian homelessness service system. Others are interventions that would work more for some groups than others. We have used these findings, along with the international findings in Chapter 3, to establish the key levers influencing the effectiveness of the Australian homelessness service system.

The fieldwork findings can be summarised as follows:

- principles to improve the effectiveness of the homelessness service system for people at all stage of the life course:
 - creating prevention and early intervention platforms through flexibility of approach and simplicity of access to services
 - creating innovative and affordable housing options and reimagining social housing
 - recognising the cultural needs of Indigenous Australians
 - increasing collaboration between different service sectors, with better system integration between mainstream and homelessness services'
 - increasing financial support, the creation of more supported employment opportunities and increased economic security
 - improving relevant education, training and awareness for people at risk of homelessness.
- different priorities for different stages:
 - young people tend to keep to a fairly tight geographical area and place-based solutions are needed
 - DFV continues to be a major cause of homelessness for families
 - older women are a fast-growing cohort facing homelessness, and provision to prevent this is needed urgently.

2. What are key levers for creating an effective homelessness service system?

Table 4 and Table 5 give further details, in summary form, of our findings from the three projects and systems thinking workshop regarding similar, and differing, priorities for improving the effectiveness of the homelessness service system across the life course. More information can be found in each of the project reports (Thredgold, Beer et al. 2019; MacKenzie, Hand et al. 2020; valentine, Blunden et al. 2020).

Table 4: Principal fieldwork findings from the three projects and systems thinking workshop regarding similar priorities for improving the effectiveness of the homelessness service system across the life course

Levers	Young people	Older people	Families	Systems thinking workshop
Creating early intervention platforms through flexibility of approach and simplicity of access to services	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Strengthen early childhood and primary-age interventions Reduce the flow of young people into homelessness and rapid rehousing The COSS model of early intervention identifies risk across several problem domains, and provides flexible long-term support Rebalance the ecosystem by expanding early intervention A purely school-based early intervention response. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Early detection and intervention for older women to prevent homelessness in the first place Attention paid to prevention and early intervention among older persons at risk of homelessness Tailored person-centred approach Include questions addressing housing security in the aged care assessment Ensure national aged care policies address housing adequacy Enhance ACH to meet needs of older people who are at risk. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Significant opportunities for early intervention in the SHSs and mainstream services Prevention and early intervention are critical for families who are at risk of homelessness Early intervention and prevention are policy priorities The challenges of family homelessness highlight the need for more rigorous conceptualisation and measurement, improved data collection and sustained support in early intervention, crisis, transitional and long-term housing. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Prevent people from becoming homeless Increase housing supply Increase brokerage options Improve assertive outreach in homelessness services.
Innovative and affordable housing options and rethinking social housing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Prevent relapsing back into homelessness The existing homelessness service system does not provide rapid rehousing Repeated calls to overhaul the youth social housing options A major expansion of housing options, including appropriate support Expand a more accessible and appropriate set of housing options Young people are not able to access social housing to the extent warranted by the evident need for supportive housing options The important model of housing options for young people exiting homelessness is 'My Foundations Youth Housing Company'. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Explore innovative housing options for Australians as they age Support for first home buyers National housing and homelessness strategy or framework to end homelessness Increase supply of social and affordable housing More public and social, affordable, appropriate housing with more options Older homeless Australians seek a home, not a house Better alignment of social and affordable housing stock to the needs of older households; affordable housing that is safe and secure; access to appropriate housing More low cost properties for rent and purchase Expand ACH Engage with aged care housing services. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> A lack of long-term and affordable housing and support options in many locations The broader problem of affordable housing supply can be traced through recognised problems with lack of exit points from crisis and temporary accommodation Cannot effectively respond to problems in housing supply, poverty, and gaps in other services Harder for women with children to find adequate housing The social housing system remains a valued and valuable option but is often inaccessible to families. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Remove regulatory and finance barriers to building more affordable housing Increase supply of social and affordable housing Manadate affordable housing requirements.

2. What are key levers for creating an effective homelessness service system?

Levers	Young people	Older people	Families	Systems thinking workshop
Recognising the needs of Indigenous Australians	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Indigenous are over-represented users of the SHS system The complex issues and experiences of Indigenous young people The lack of culturally appropriate service provision and practices at some services Culturally appropriate practice involves understanding and knowing how to work with the young person Young people need choice 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Have somewhere for people who are one payslip away from losing their accommodation to go to, or someone they can speak to Points of referral linked to aged and seniors' specific services across the social services system A central point for crisis housing and appropriate and safe housing Granny flats in backyards Improve consultation and engagement for planning and services Awareness-raising about seniors' rights in society A central-intake centre with case coordination; dormitory housing for respite; interagency communications. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The needs of Indigenous families are significant and multi-factorial Indigenous homeless Australians are alike in that the single largest reported cause of their homelessness is DFV Indigenous families' circumstances have effects on their risks of homelessness Indigenous people generally experience higher rates of homelessness compared with non-Indigenous people and it is highest among young people, including children. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Increase the cultural competency of homelessness service system organisations.
Collaboration between different sectors, better system integration and homelessness services	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The challenge is that a more cross-sectoral integrated or collective impact response ideally requires different government departments Effective, sustainable systems approach and continuum of seamless support Child and youth-focussed family-centred practices in priority locations Collaboration between government, community, businesses and services Integrate Youth Foyers into the exit pathways for young people leaving SHSs Improved access through Youth Entry Points Extend state care until 21 years. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Better coordination, integration and collaboration between and within services systems Integration of aged care, homelessness, health, social service and disability systems A dialogue and linkages between aged care, housing and homelessness sectors Establish a dialogue between homelessness and aged care providers Support SHS network with aged care providers Include outreach facilities for persons at risk of homelessness in face-to-face hubs within the aged care system Redesign the age pension Develop strategies to connect older people to their communities. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Local practices of collaboration and integration Integration of housing and non-housing support Producing positive client outcomes needs further examination, including integration of homelessness, DFV, mainstream services Homelessness occurs in the contexts of systems failures that include the transitions between homelessness and mainstream service systems The relationship between homelessness services and other services is often effective in terms of local practice Homelessness outcomes framework be developed, in partnership with the states and territories. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Remove silos and challenges for service integration.

2. What are key levers for creating an effective homelessness service system?

Levers	Young people	Older people	Families	Systems thinking workshop
Increasing financial supports, more employment opportunities and increasing economic security	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The income support and employment support requirements The problem facing young people is not explicit in housing policy nor appropriately considered in employment support policy The passage to independent living has become an increasingly difficult transition for young Australians The later entry into the labour market; the insecurity and casualisation of employment; the high rents—particularly in capital cities Criticism of the income and employment support systems for homeless and highly disadvantaged young people are not well served by the centralised system Young people who experience homelessness or who are unemployed, cannot rent in the private market with rental assistance Support for pathways to employment. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Increase single parents' payments so it is a viable income for women and their families Increase and index the Homeless Supplement for residential aged care providers An urgent increase to income support such as Newstart and a review of eligibility for disability support More secure funding, and more flexible funding, so that additional services are created More government funding; accountability; transparency; support; streamlined processes; access points; simple language; and forms in multiple languages. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Access to permanent housing mitigates the detrimental effects of homelessness and the shelter environment on the outcomes of families and children Changes to the homelessness service system will be effective only if they incorporate interventions addressing the broad economic and social drivers of homelessness Integration of housing and non-housing support Homelessness occurs in the contexts of structural economic and societal barriers for families living in poverty Changes to the homelessness service system will be effective only if they incorporate interventions addressing the broad economic and social drivers of homelessness. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Increase income support rental subsidy payments for low income people and families Deal with gender and cultural inequalities regarding superannuation and employment Increase employment opportunities for people at risk of homelessness.
Improving relevant education, training and awareness for people at risk of homelessness	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Redesign systems with a focus on community-level organisation, planning, access and outcomes measurement The focus is local, rather than discrete, centrally managed programs Engagement in education and training – as well as support for pathways to employment For adolescents, it is their school and the education and training system more broadly The Youth Foyer model has been widely accepted and supported as a housing model for at-risk or homeless young people Young people who leave school early are more likely to experience homelessness later on. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Empowerment and education for older people of their rights; this may require modest government outlays Strategies and education programs to strengthen relationships Financial education and information for women that includes challenging gendered norms and myths Training, education and employment support for women Appropriate training and skills acquisition to ready people for re-employment Effective retraining for employment in the contemporary economy, with meaningful actions taken against age discrimination in the workplace. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The SHS contributes to improving client housing, education, training and employment status. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Improve client trust in homelessness and related services.

Source: Authors.

Table 5: Principal fieldwork findings from the three projects and systems thinking workshop regarding life stage specific priorities for improving the effectiveness of the homelessness service system

Young people	Older people	Families
<p>Place-based perspective:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Child and youth-focussed family-centred practices in priority locations • Development where program position descriptions were superseded by multi-skilled 'youth and family worker' generic positions • Represent a place-based community approach, and there is evidence of interest in further exploration • A shift to place-based 'collective impact' approaches to systemic change for vulnerable young people • The COSS model represents a place-based approach to services and support for young people • The perspective that emerged from this line of thought was reframing and reorganising service provision from the current program-oriented perspective to a place-based perspective. 	<p>Homelessness among older women:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Providers of homelessness services to older women to use more assertive methods to contact those at risk • Increase single parents' payments so it is a viable income for women and their families • More and better gender-specific data to inform policy development and service delivery • Financial literacy programs for women, starting from a young age • Programs that will assist women to more effectively contribute to superannuation • Mentoring and networking for women at risk • Networks and relationships with other services, such as allied health, gerontology, and so on • Effective retraining for employment in the contemporary economy, with meaningful actions taken against age discrimination in the workplace. 	<p>Family violence:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Homelessness occurs in the contexts of individual and relational aspects such as trauma, family violence, limited supports and extreme poverty • More needs to be known about the Australian experiences of homelessness in families and the interactions of structural and personal drivers for people at risk • Additional challenges and potential benefits lie in better responses to domestic and family violence, and in early intervention and prevention • Partnerships between sectors: some service providers are actively reaching out to real estate agencies to improve their understanding of DFV and the availability of private rental assistance and other support.

Source: Authors.

2.3.3 Recognising the needs of Indigenous Australians

Throughout our fieldwork, it became clear that there is much to be learned from what people consider to be ineffective about the existing homelessness services support system in Australia. This was notably true concerning consistent reports by Indigenous Australians: the lack of culturally appropriate service provision and practice (that is available both from SHSs and other service providers) has a detrimental effect on the quality and effectiveness of the service in preventing and dealing with homelessness.

There is sometimes a mismatch between Western systems and the needs of Indigenous Australians. Service providers need to recognise the importance of learning about and understanding Indigenous family practices, particularly that what non-Indigenous people see as 'extended' family is 'close' family to Indigenous Australians.

The effectiveness of flexible brokerage funding for Indigenous Australians was stressed by participants. Homelessness due to poverty brought about by large utility debts, themselves caused by overcrowding, for instance, can be prevented using flexible brokerage funding that can help pay debts and rent arrears. Brokerage can also help cover the costs of travel for 'sorry business', to assist clients to travel to a funeral and to assist people moving home or location.

For real improvements to occur, Indigenous Australians must be included in the planning, provision and delivery of services and responses to homelessness. Such involvement is consistent with the concepts of reciprocity and reflexivity that are a vital part of Indigenous research methodologies.

These findings are also consistent with previous AHURI research (Spinney, Habibis et al. 2016: 64):

“Indigenous organisation service providers and some of the mainstream organisations emphasised the inappropriateness of a ‘one size fits all’ approach to service provision, saying culturally adapted services were essential for Indigenous people experiencing or at risk of homelessness.”

2.3.4 Flexibility of approach and simplicity of access to services

Our research participants reported that inflexibility from Centrelink can lead people to becoming homeless. For instance, grandmothers who care for grandchildren, but do not receive Centrelink funding to help pay their housing and living costs, can face real difficulties.

An increasingly complex and demanding income-support system was seen to disadvantage older people who are homeless, placing undue burdens on them. For many older people, who are first-time homeless and previously led lives independent of the income-support system, Centrelink and its policies and processes come as a shock that exacerbates the grief and shame of finding oneself without a secure home.

Other suggestions included:

- providing older people access to support workers to help them navigate their way through government systems and provide additional information
- models of care based on developing long-term relationships between service providers and older homeless people are needed
- a greater number of service points is needed, with distribution in a variety of locations.

2.4 Some examples of collaboration and integration in the Australian homelessness service system

In this section, we discuss selected examples of how organisations have levered the existing service system and developed models of collaboration and integration. In Chapter 4, we build on these examples, along with the learnings from international homelessness service systems, to suggest a potential roadmap to reconfigure the homelessness service system in Australia.

2.4.1 Community of Schools and Services in Geelong

The Community of Schools and Services (COSS) model of early intervention proactively identifies young people and families at risk of homelessness and provides flexible long-term support to prevent homelessness and improve educational outcomes. The place-based approach to services and support for young people includes mainstream schools sharing data, and working collaboratively, to deliver services in an efficient and effective way. The model involves collaborative decision-making within a community collective of agencies and schools, under a formal memorandum of understanding. The flexible and responsive practice framework provides three levels of response:

1. active monitoring
2. short-term support
3. wrap-around support – for complex cases.

The COSS model in Geelong has reduced adolescent homelessness by 40 per cent and seen a 20 per cent reduction in early school-leaving. The COSS model has eight streams of program funding that are not siloed, but rather operate an early intervention platform of youth and family workers working to a single intake point and on a needs basis that is not dictated by funded programs.

The successes of the COSS model are considered to be (McKenzie, Hand et al. 2020):

- local community leadership in one of the participating key stakeholders – ideally the lead agency responsible for the early intervention support work
- the construction of a formalised community collective through a community development process
- a population-screening methodology that can proactively identify vulnerable youth and families prior to the onset of crises
- a flexible practice framework that can efficiently manage proactive support to at-risk youth and their families, but still be able to be reactive when crises occur
- a single entry point into the support system for young people in need
- a data-intensive approach to risk identification, monitoring and measuring outcomes.

2.4.2 Assistance with Care and Housing for the Aged model

Throughout our fieldwork, participants revealed that it is when service provision is integrated that they consider they are receiving an effective service. An example of this is the Assistance with Care and Housing for the Aged (ACHA) model for older people, which embraces a range of providers and was considered to have substantial impact on reducing homelessness. Unfortunately, ACHA is hindered; it is both underfunded and understaffed. Expansion of the program would offer a simple first step to better support this vulnerable group (Thredgold, Beer et al. 2019).

2.4.3 Barwon Child, Youth and Family

This youth-focussed and family-centred organisation provides integrated support to young people consisting of housing workers, a Reconnect worker and counsellors. The Reconnect early intervention program assists young people to stabilise their living situations and improve their engagement with family, work, education, training and their local communities through counselling, group work, mediation and practical support, and links young people with specialised support such as mental health services (valentine, Blunden et al. 2020).

2.4.4 Providing long-term solutions

My Foundations Youth Housing Company is the first Australian youth-specific social housing provider, managing over 500 properties. It is one of the few not-for-profit organisations in Australia providing longer-term accommodation for young people who are not students.

The Rent Choice Youth program complements Commonwealth Rent Assistance (CRA). The program provides support and encouragement to gain employment and an increased income, so that over time young people will be able to afford a private rental without assistance. The program is open to 16 to 24-year-olds without a place to live, who are willing to engage with a support provider and who want to study or train with a view to achieving employment.

2.5 Policy development implications

This chapter has focussed on the key levers for creating an effective homelessness service system. This research has implications for the following policies:

- shifting focus on a homelessness response – from the current focus on crisis response to early intervention and prevention
- the structure of local services and the importance of coalitions of cooperative services in addressing the local demand from homeless persons and people at risk of homelessness
- the need to go beyond the work of SHSs and consider including other related service systems within the homelessness service system
- the need for more long-term affordable housing to relieve the ‘choke points’ in the homelessness service system that prevent people from moving, on and to facilitate rapid rehousing and a Housing First approach
- assertive outreach and the involvement of mainstream welfare agencies as a first line of response to homelessness
- a person-centred approach
- differing strategies, intervention points and types of response for different stages in the life course
- interagency collaboration and co-location of services.

In the following chapter, we examine what can be learned from international service systems in order to reconfigure a more effective Australian homelessness service system.

3. What can we learn from international homelessness service systems?

- **The shift from crisis-oriented service provision to prevention and early intervention is a developing international trend in European countries such as Sweden, Norway and Finland, as well as in Wales, Scotland and England.**
- **Homelessness prevention can be usefully categorised five ways as universal, targeted, crisis, emergency and recovery prevention.**
- **By adopting a Housing First approach, Finland and Norway have dramatically reduced the number of homeless people in their jurisdictions.**
- **In developing integrated strategies to reduce and end homelessness, five factors are important: starting with the rights and needs of each person, prevention and early intervention; a Housing First approach; strategic funding; a continuous and constant initiative; and multi-level governance.**
- **A key lesson from the United Kingdom's innovations is to focus on developing prevention as a multi-layered set of services that range from basic, generic housing advice through to a range of specialist support services designed to meet the needs of specific groups.**
- **In Canada, advocacy around a 'duty to assist' homeless young persons lays the basis for the role of universal welfare services in homelessness prevention, and a similar approach could be developed in Australia.**
- **As a core part of an ambitious five-year action plan to abolish homelessness, Glasgow City Council is establishing an alliance with provider organisations under which responsibility for financial allocation, management and governance will be transferred to the alliance.**

In this chapter, we seek to answer part of our first inquiry research question: *What can we learn from national and international homelessness service systems?* We do this by examining selected examples of innovative practice from overseas in order to learn how a new, effective homelessness service system can be designed and implemented in Australia. We highlight some international examples of innovation that respond to our search for key levers that have been used in international settings to improve the effectiveness of homelessness service systems, especially regarding homelessness prevention.

3.1 Homelessness prevention typology

One of the findings of this research is the need to shift the focus of the homelessness service system from crisis response towards early intervention and prevention. Already, many countries around the world have shifted, or are in the process of shifting, their perspective on homelessness from crisis response to early intervention and prevention – none more so than the four countries of the United Kingdom (England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland).

In a recent policy briefing assessing the effectiveness of homelessness prevention in the United Kingdom, Fitzpatrick, Mackie and Wood (2019: 3) developed the following five-category typology of prevention:

- universal prevention – preventing or minimising homelessness risks across the population at large
- targeted prevention – upstream prevention focussed on high-risk groups, such as vulnerable young people, and risky transitions, such as leaving local authority care, prison or mental health in-patient treatment
- crisis prevention – preventing homelessness likely to occur within 56 days, in line with legislation across Great Britain on ‘threatened with homelessness’
- emergency prevention – support for those at immediate risk of homelessness, especially sleeping rough
- recovery prevention – prevention of repeat homelessness and rough sleeping.

This typology was used to assess developments in prevention across the countries of the United Kingdom. It is also relevant to Australia, as it highlights different types of prevention and how different agencies can play an intervening role. Universal prevention calls attention to the role of mainstream agencies providing income support, housing, health, mental health and education in preventing and minimising the risks of homelessness across all Australia. Targeted prevention identifies at-risk populations among the clients of universal welfare services. In Australia, target and crisis prevention can be conflated, as they both highlight the importance of early intervention by homelessness and welfare agencies. Recovery prevention highlights a particular group of homeless people.

This typology focuses prevention on different groups with an aim to reduce the number of people who become homeless and dramatically reduce the use of temporary accommodation (Mackie 2015).

The key messages around prevention of homelessness centre on flexibility and on the comprehensiveness of service responses. What an individual person or household requires to prevent them from becoming homeless can range from basic housing advice, through to a package of care and support that is specifically designed for their needs. Identification of potentially long-term homeless people should be at the core of preventative strategy, including ‘at-risk’ groups such as young people with mental health problems and problematic drug use, and socially marginalised migrant populations (Pleace, Culhane et al. 2015).

3.2 Innovative practice from overseas

3.2.1 Widespread use of Housing First approaches

The Housing First model prescribes safe and permanent housing as the first priority for people experiencing homelessness. Once housing is secured, a multi-disciplinary team of support workers can address complex needs through services like drug and alcohol counselling or mental health treatment. However, an individual's engagement with these support services is not required for them to maintain accommodation. Each individual is assisted in sustaining their housing as they work towards recovery and reintegration with the community at their own pace.

Two countries in Europe have been able to demonstrate a reduction in the number of people who are homeless. This has been done by transitioning from a crisis accommodation response system, such as we have in Australia, to Housing First systems that are based on long-term national strategies of prevention and early intervention. Between 2012 and 2016, Norway experienced a 36 per cent drop in the number of people who are homeless (FEANTSA and Abbé Pierre Foundation 2018: 16). In 2012, Norway commenced providing Housing First services and by 2015, 14 municipalities had a Housing First scheme in place (Benjaminsen and Knutagård 2016: 50). Finland experienced a 10 per cent drop in the number of homeless people between 2013 and 2016 (FEANTSA and Abbé Pierre Foundation 2018: 16).

Housing First is a response to homelessness based on the premise that homeless people are more successful in recovering from homelessness if they are moved as quickly as possible into permanent housing (Gaetz 2014). Housing is provided as a right, regardless of the complexity of the needs of the person who is homeless. Their support needs are provided around their housing. There is a copious body of evidence that Housing First is effective (Goering and Streiner 2015) and that 'treatment first' approaches are more costly and less effective (Ly and Latimer 2015).

Housing First has now been adopted in the United States, Canada and Europe as an effective and supporting response to people who have been homeless, especially if their homelessness has been long-term. Research on Housing First demonstrates that it is an effective intervention with a record of evidence, and also that it is more cost-effective than crisis-driven approaches (Larimer, Malone et al. 2009; Goering, Veldhuizen et al. 2012; 2014; Gaetz and Scott 2012).

Several common strategies emerge when examining the practice of homelessness prevention in these countries:

- specific prevention programs targeting young people, including specialised social work services
- developing special housing support programs for offenders transitioning back to the community, and for women facing domestic violence.

It is clear that interventions to prevent evictions, to mediate with landlords and family members and to provide connections between at-risk populations and other community resources have had a significant impact on efforts to avert homelessness (Pleace, Culhane et al. 2015; Pleace 2016).

Housing First in Canada

In Canada, Housing First has also been introduced for young people who have experienced homelessness. There, the principles of Housing First for Youth are:

- immediate access to housing with no pre-conditions
- youth choice and self-determination
- positive youth development orientation.

Housing First services follow the core philosophy that housing is a human right. Provision of housing is not conditional on behaving in a certain way, nor is retaining housing. Housing First service users should have the same level of security and rights as anyone renting a home or an apartment. Housing First follows a harm reduction approach and people using Housing First can exercise choices as to whether or not they use services. Support is also flexible, non-judgemental and open-ended.

There are variations in how Housing First is delivered. This variation centres on where support is delivered and how it is delivered. Housing First can be communal or congregate (such as apartment blocks that only contain apartments for formerly long-term homeless people); or scattered (such as ordinary apartments or houses that are not close to one another using mobile workers). Housing First can have dedicated, comprehensive services, with a staff team including mental health and drug and alcohol specialists (one example is assertive community treatment). There are also case management-based Housing First services, where the role of workers centres on coordinating externally provided health, social work, drug and alcohol, and other support services (Pleace, Culhane et al. 2015; Pleace 2016).

Canadian roadmap for the prevention of youth homelessness: a statutory responsibility to prevent youth homelessness

A 'duty to assist' means that communities are provided with necessary resources and supports by higher levels of government to enable them to fulfil the requirement of providing information, advice and assistance to people who are at risk of experiencing homelessness. The Canadian roadmap has the following features:

- state responsibility
- funding for prevention programs
- promise of assistance to young people aged 25 and under within 14 days
- place-based, youth-centred support
- meaningful adults in lives of young people (such as teachers, coaches, community workers, child protection workers, employment workers, faith leaders) have a duty to offer support and/or facilitate access to supports
- the homelessness sector still has a key role in supporting marginalised young people.

Housing First in other countries

In Sweden, people using Housing First value the sense of independence and control from having their own home, valued peer support and the capacity of developed trusting relationships with Housing First service providers. Scattered site Housing First services in Sweden have struggled to find suitable housing, in part because of shortages of affordable housing, but also because private landlords and housing companies can be reluctant to house formerly homeless people (Pleace, Culhane et al. 2015).

In the United States, Housing First is prominent in federal, state and city-level homelessness strategies and has been adopted as the primary program for people experiencing 'chronic' homelessness. Success in ending long-term homelessness has been associated with providing people a home and their own living space, which they control and value (Pleace, Culhane et al. 2015).

In the United Kingdom, Housing First schemes use a mix of social rented and private rented housing, with considerable variation, but there is neither a dedicated budget nor a national strategy. The United Kingdom has also experimented with more flexible, housing-led approaches using mobile support (Pleace, Culhane et al. 2015).

Housing First Europe

Housing First Europe was a pilot scheme conducted across five different test sites in five different welfare regimes (Amsterdam, Lisbon, Budapest, Copenhagen and Glasgow) to trial a Housing First approach. It ran from August 2011 until June 2013.

While each test site differed slightly in its approach, the overall project was guided by eight key principles, namely (Busch-Geertsema 2013: 18):

- housing as a basic human right
- respect, warmth, and compassion for all clients
- a commitment to working with clients for as long as they need
- scattered site housing; independent apartments
- separation of housing and services
- consumer choice and self-determination
- a recovery orientation
- harm reduction.

In all five test sites, the Housing First project was one of the first pioneering attempts to test this approach in an environment dominated by emergency provision for homeless people with no or very weak links to the regular housing market. Only the project in Copenhagen was part of a national (and local) strategy to promote and implement the Housing First approach on a wider scale.

The service users matched different target groups with a high proportion of substance abuse in most projects and single, long-term homeless men predominated across the different test sites. Support needed to access housing and securing a long-term tenancy was high, with financial problems and lack of employment common. Different patterns of support were needed over time, with high service user satisfaction garnered.

There were high housing retention rates achieved across four of the five sites, with Budapest being the exception. This failure was seen as a result of that site departing from Housing First principles.

The positive results show that the Housing First approach can be a highly successful way of ending the homelessness of people with severe support needs and helping them to sustain a permanent tenancy. The majority of the target group, including people with severe addictions, are capable of living in ordinary housing if adequate support is provided. A recommendation is to use predominantly ordinary scattered housing and independent apartments that are not concentrated in a single building.

Rapid access to housing, multi-dimensional support of high intensity provided for as long as necessary, and housing costs covered long-term were seen as crucial for success.

However, there were problems with neighbourhood conflicts and nuisance noise and behaviour across all five sites. Policies to effectively manage and control this would need to be considered and implemented.

Overall, the Housing First approach provided a highly successful and cost-effective response to reduce homelessness. AHURI has produced two relevant research reports on Housing First, as well as an AHURI Brief that surveys the overseas literature and provides data evaluating Housing First programs (AHURI 2018; Johnson, Parkinson and Parsell 2012; Wood, Flatau et al. 2016).

3.2.2 Integrated strategies to reduce homelessness

A coherent homelessness service system needs ‘prevention, rapid rehousing, lower intensity services, high intensity supported housing ... and sufficient homes’ (Pleace 2018).

There are five factors in developing integrated strategies to reduce and end homelessness (FEANTSA and Abbé Pierre Foundation 2018: 23–29):

1. ‘The needs and the rights of the individual should be the starting point for any strategy to fight homelessness.’
2. ‘Housing First’, noting that the construction of affordable housing is fundamental to this policy.
3. ‘Funding the strategy’ is key, for without adequate and long-term investment the strategy to end homelessness is destined to fail.
4. ‘The importance of a continuous and constant strategy.’ For over 20 years, Finland has had an integrated strategy and has built new permanent housing, converted emergency housing into supported units and developed new service models – all based on Housing First principles.
5. Multi-level governance: ‘A convergence of stakeholders in the fight against homelessness is necessary to invest all efforts on moving together towards the same objectives.’

Sweden

From the Swedish perspective, the best way to end homelessness is to prevent people from becoming homeless by providing enough housing supply that is affordable and accessible. One of the key strategies has been to prevent eviction, especially for families with children threatened by eviction. Another innovation is the use of rental advisors who help clients to stay housed, including young people, former offenders and people with mental health problems (Pleace, Culhane et al. 2015; Pleace 2016).

Norway

Norway has taken a long-term approach in its national strategy, combining social supports with housing. Since 2000 there have been four government strategies (Dyb 2017: 26):

- *Project Homeless 2001–2002*
- *National strategy to fight and prevent homelessness: the pathway to a permanent home 2005–2007*
- *Social Housing Development Program (Housing Bank’s municipality program) 2009–2017*
- *Housing for welfare: a national strategy for housing and support services 2014–2020*, with goals of moving towards housing-led responses to homelessness.

Finland

Finland has an integrated homelessness strategy that also includes prevention, building new social housing, and a mix of support services. The Finnish Government recognised that for Housing First strategies to work there needed to be an adequate, affordable housing supply with reasonable security of tenure (Pleace 2018).

The success in Finland is attributed to (Benjaminsen and Knutagård 2016: 50):

1. an intensive focus on reducing long-term homelessness
2. a comprehensive national strategy with substantial resources devoted to establishing new housing units
3. converting shelters into permanent housing for long-term homeless people.

The core aim of the Finnish Homelessness Reduction program has been to tackle long-term homelessness and to improve prevention of homelessness. In Finland, homelessness prevention is targeted to specific sub-populations at risk, including people exiting prisons and psychiatric hospitals, as well as vulnerable youth. Preventing homelessness among people exiting institutions is part of the fight against social exclusion, which in practice means strengthening housing skills, the coordination of social support networks and arranging housing before release. Finland housing advice has proven to be a cost-effective way of preventing evictions. This advice is preventing the homelessness of families with children from a migrant background and for homeless families with rental debts (Pleace, Culhane et al. 2015).

A key target was to cease using shared shelters and to replace them with housing units with permanent tenancies. Housing units implement community-based ways of working that aim to strengthen the social integration of the residents, regarding both their personal lives, their interpersonal relationships in the housing unit and their relationship with wider society.

The Finnish efforts to abolish homelessness have continued to evolve, including a more robust housing development and acquisition strategy, a focus on Housing First principles over shelters, the functional separation of housing and services, and the fuller integration of the new supported housing units within community development plans. The efforts continue to emphasise a balance of roles and responsibilities among the varying levels of government and their partners in the non-profit sector (Pleace, Culhane et al. 2015).

3.2.3 Innovations in the four countries of the United Kingdom

The United Kingdom first introduced homelessness legislation in the 1970s with the *Housing (Homeless Persons) Act 1977*. There have been several iterations since then. The devolution of the four countries of the United Kingdom has led to separate homelessness legislation in Scotland, Wales and England. The United Kingdom's 'Housing Options' model addresses people's housing needs to avoid homelessness and includes both enabling people to retain existing housing and facilitating a move into new housing. Preventative services go beyond housing advice, and can include support services such as:

- case management for homelessness linked to unmet support needs
- mediation services for young people who are sharing housing
- Sanctuary (Safe at Home, Staying Home, Leaving Violence) type schemes to prevent homelessness associated with DFV
- floating support services to both prevent and reduce homelessness and offer low intensity case management.

The key lessons centre on developing prevention as a multi-layered set of services that range from basic, generic, housing advice through to a range of specialist support services designed to meet the needs of specific groups, such as women at risk of violence, ex-offenders and vulnerable young people (Pleace, Culhane et al. 2015).

3.2.4 Wales

The Housing (Wales) Act 2014

This pioneering legislation charges local authorities in Wales to take reasonable steps to prevent and relieve homelessness. In order to meet this 'duty to assist', they should have available a wide range of assistance options and should consider which intervention, or interventions, is most suited for each individual or family that asks for help.

The Act prioritises homelessness prevention and makes access to prevention services a universal right that is challengeable through the courts if not provided. Funding for services has been reorientated towards preventing homelessness. At the core of this approach is the right to settled housing, which originates from the *Housing Act 1977* (Mackie 2015). This is, of course, very different from the situation in Australia, where there is no such legal right.

The Welsh model has the following features (Mackie 2015):

- **Duty to prevent homelessness:** Local authorities are required to deliver prevention support to all households seeking help who are at risk of homelessness. This is successful for 68 per cent of clients.
- **Help to secure:** For those whose homelessness isn't prevented, or who only seek help after becoming homeless, local authorities must attempt to secure housing. This is successful for 41 per cent of clients.
- **Duty to secure:** For those whose homelessness persists, the local authority has a duty to secure housing if they are in priority need. Of these households, 80 per cent are successfully accommodated.

Mackie (2015) outlines the following interventions local authorities are expected to have in place:

- accommodation-based:
 - options to facilitate access to the private rental sector
 - arranging accommodation with relatives and friends
 - access to supported housing
 - securing crisis accommodation.
- advice:
 - Housing Options advisors
 - specialist advice on benefits and debts
 - independent housing advice
 - employment and training advice.
- joint working:
 - joint working between local authorities and registered social landlords (community housing providers)
 - joint services approach between social care and health.
 - specific population groups:
 - welfare services for armed forces and veterans
 - accommodation options for vulnerable people
 - support for disabled applicants
 - working in prisons prior to prisoner release
 - DFV services.
- support:
 - mediation and conciliation
 - intensive family support teams
 - housing and tenancy support
 - action to resolve anti-social behaviour.
- financial:
 - financial payments
 - actions to intervene with mortgage arrears.

The legislation has been successful in the following ways (Mackie 2019):

- The Welsh homelessness service system has become reoriented towards prevention.
- Successful outcomes have been achieved in almost the same numbers for single people and for family groups.
- Service culture has improved in terms of providing a more wrap-around service, more options for support, and workers providing a more personal service.

There have been criticisms of the way that the Act operates, principally that the structural cause of the lack of affordable accommodation has not been addressed, and that there has been a piecemeal take-up of the ethos of the Act by differing local authorities. However, it has been deemed effective enough that the policy framework has been taken up in England with the *Homelessness Reduction Act 2017*, and the Canada is working towards a 'duty to assist' (Mackie 2019).

3.2.5 Scotland

In Scotland, the *Housing (Scotland) Act 2001* expanded the statutory duty of Scottish local authorities. Under the legislation, most Scottish households who find themselves homeless are assisted into housing. This housing-led solution to homelessness comes along with associated multiagency-funded housing support programs such as 'Supporting People', which operated from 2003 to 2008. More than 50 per cent of clients receive permanent or open-ended support in mainstream housing (Anderson 2007). Scotland recently released the *Ending Homelessness Together: High Level Action Plan*, highlighting how extensive co-production processes can build networks for collaboration to end homelessness.

Alliance to End Homelessness: Glasgow, Scotland

Glasgow has a population of 615,000; representing 10 per cent of the population of Scotland. Glasgow City Council receives over 5,000 homelessness applications per year.

Glasgow City Council conducted a homelessness strategic review in 2016. From that it was recognised that there was a need for services to be redesigned with a strong focus on responding to individual need and improving outcomes through multi-agency partnerships and co-production across the homelessness service sector. An ambitious systems-change program for tackling homelessness in Glasgow has commenced.

Glasgow's ambitious five-year action plan to abolish homelessness aims to reduce the time in temporary accommodation by 50 per cent and stop using bed and breakfast accommodation altogether. The city is replacing 100 temporary furnished flats and 500 hostel places with 600 housing first tenancies for the most disadvantaged and complex homeless people. At the core of this work is an alliance that has been formed to eliminate homelessness from Glasgow.

An alliance is a vehicle to share risks, responsibilities and opportunities and is a way of working based on alignment around agreed outcomes and commitment to principles and behaviours. The specific purpose is to transform, deliver and co-ordinate a redesigned and modernised purchased service sector. This Alliance is the first of its kind in the United Kingdom.

The contract notice published by the council contained the following description of the Alliance (Glasgow City Council 2018):

"Glasgow City Council is seeking to establish an Alliance with provider organisations to end homelessness in Glasgow. The alliance will plan and deliver a large scale transformational change agenda across the purchased service sector redesigning and delivering modernised services and support to maximise potential for independent living."

The Alliance has six main objectives:

1. transforming current services to quickly support homeless people into their own tenancies
2. providing housing-led approaches that promote and defend people's right to mainstream housing and also assists people to remain there with the right support
3. managing systemic change through the innovative application of rapid rehousing, strengths based, and tenancy sustainment approaches
4. enhancing and maximising use or access to mainstream services wherever possible to support homeless individuals
5. safeguarding the most vulnerable homeless people with appropriate short- to medium-term crisis responses
6. working alongside and in partnership with statutory homelessness services, housing providers, strategic partners and individuals with lived experience in order to improve the experience and outcomes for individuals who use homelessness services.

The anticipated target outcomes include:

- reducing the number of people experiencing homelessness
- ending rough sleeping for homeless Glasgow citizens
- reducing stigma for homeless people
- reducing the rate of repeat homelessness
- reducing the length of time that people are homeless
- transformational change of purchased services
- actual costs that are equal to or less than allocated funding
- shifting from crisis to early intervention and prevention work.

The establishment of the Alliance will result in the transfer of responsibility for financial allocation, management and governance arrangements to the Alliance leadership team, of which Glasgow City Council is an equal member. Alliance members align around outcomes and a commitment to principles. There is a housing-led approach and flexible at home support for people rehoused after experiencing homelessness. The Alliance can sub-contract work if necessary.

The initial Alliance contract was awarded in February 2020 following a tendering process involving two competing bids, and is worth £187 million over a 10-year period. Seven organisations make up the winning group. While Glasgow City Council maintains responsibility for statutory homelessness services, the Alliance will make financial and operational decisions on the provision of purchased services regarding Housing First, emergency accommodation and outreach. The Alliance will assume a collective responsibility for all of the risks involved in providing services under the agreement and decisions are to be made on a best-for-service basis.

Importantly, we need to acknowledge that while an alliance based on the experience in Glasgow is one model, it is not the only possible solution potentially available to governments and communities. Critically, the alliance model represents four things:

- First, it is an acknowledgement that existing approaches and services are not providing a workable solution and that change is needed.
- Second, it recognises the need to place the needs and interests of those who are homeless, or at risk of becoming homeless, at the forefront of discussions around reform.

- Third, it accepts that it is more cost effective, and more impactful, to solve the challenges of homelessness before they arise, and that prevention-based approaches will deliver more at a lower cost.
- Fourth, there is a pressing need to challenge, and rethink, existing service models, accepting that some participants in the sector may not have a role addressing homelessness into the future, though they are likely to have different – and more impactful – role in other areas of social services.

3.2.6 England

Homelessness Reduction Act 2017

The *Homelessness Reduction Act 2017* came into effect in England on 3 April 2018. It aims to reduce and prevent homelessness in five key ways:

1. improving advice from local authorities to single homeless people and advice to prevent homelessness
2. extending the period considered 'threatened with homelessness' from 28 days to 56 days and extending the legal responsibilities of the housing authority to cover that period
3. introducing new duties on behalf of local authorities to prevent and relieve homelessness, regardless of priority need, by creating an obligation on behalf of local authorities to provide interim accommodation to any individual who is or at risk of becoming homeless and providing them with tailored support
4. introducing assessments and personalised housing plans setting out actions to be carried out by both the individual and the local authority, along with timespans in order to either relieve or prevent the individual's homelessness
5. encouraging public bodies to work more closely together to prevent homelessness by creating a duty to refer an individual to the local authority if they assess that individual is or is at risk of becoming homeless (such public bodies include prison and probation services, Job Centres and NHS Trusts).

The Act has substantially increased the number of people in England who are eligible for housing support, particularly single homeless people, but it has also meant that people who are at risk of homelessness have less priority for social housing and are often accommodated in the private rental sector.

Effectiveness of the Act

The Act was seen as the biggest shake-up of homelessness in England in a generation, especially in creating legal duties for local authorities to provide interim accommodation to anyone deemed to be in need regardless of priority, as well as creating a duty to form personalised housing plans for each individual to relieve homelessness. However, parts of the Act have been seen, in some degree, as a failure. The reasons for this are twofold. First, the Act does nothing to address the root causes of homelessness and, in a time of increased austerity, this has led to spiralling private rents, welfare reforms and cuts to local authority budgets, and a corresponding rise in homelessness that the Act does not address.

The other key failing of the Act, related to the first, is that it creates onerous new legal duties on local authorities to relieve homelessness, such as a duty to provide interim accommodation to individuals in need, without any extra provision of funding to local authorities to meet those duties. The aim was that preventing homelessness before people became homeless would allow the local authority to save money on shelters and other forms of homeless relief. This has not occurred. Up to two-thirds of local authorities have stated that they cannot afford to meet their obligations under the Act (Butler 2018; 2019; Homeless Link 2017).

3.3 Policy development implications

This review of international literature and practice has a number of potential policy implications for Australia:

- The homelessness prevention typology highlights the different points at which prevention of homelessness can be effected and how different agencies can play an intervening role.
- The review of innovative practice from overseas highlighted some possible future directions for homelessness policy in Australia:
 - the widespread use of Housing First
 - the shift of many countries towards prevention and early intervention in homelessness strategies and the move away from crisis accommodation provision as the primary response
 - importance of 'duty to assist' among universal welfare agencies
 - the restructuring of purchaser-provider services and competition among services for funds
 - the development of alliances incorporating government and purchased services operating on a cooperative basis.
- Five factors emerged as significant in the development of integrated strategies to reduce and end homelessness:
 - a starting point with the needs and the rights of homeless persons
 - Housing First
 - an adequate and long-term investment funding strategy
 - a continuous and constant strategy
 - multi-level governance.

4. How might Australia reconfigure its homelessness service system in order to effectively support the prevention and minimisation of homelessness across the life course?

- **Homelessness in Australia is a social problem that can be solved.**
- **However, solving homelessness will not be easy because it is complicated by our Federal system of government, and by the failure to share the responsibility for developing solutions.**
- **To solve the problem of homelessness, we need a fundamental change in approach.**
- **We are proposing:**
 - a repositioning of how we seek to improve homelessness services in the context of a broader system approach to the problem of homelessness
 - a reconfiguration of the Australian homelessness service system
 - a new, integrated national homelessness initiative.
- **We propose that a fundamental change in approach to homelessness would:**
 - focus on prevention and early intervention rather than a crisis-driven response
 - incorporate a Housing First approach to the provision of housing and support for people exiting homelessness
 - provide an adequately planned supply of social and affordable housing.

- **We propose a reconfiguration of the Australian homelessness service system, with the primary elements being:**
 - a changed role for universal welfare services and SHSs, such that universal welfare services instigate a 'duty to assist' and screen for risk of homelessness, provide brokerage funding to assist clients to maintain existing housing or access new housing, and refer to an SHS and Housing First agency, when necessary
 - an explicit acknowledgement that governments – state, territory and federal – are just one part of the system seeking to reduce the impact of homelessness on affected individuals. There is a need for genuine dialogue between governments, the not-for-profit sector and other stakeholders
 - state and territory governments developing local alliances comprising providers of purchased homelessness services and government, following the example of Glasgow.
- **We propose a new, integrated National Homelessness Initiative, a funding arrangement that will give effect to a fundamental change in approach to homelessness and a reconfigured homelessness service system.**

This chapter deals with the last of our Inquiry research questions:

How might Australia reconfigure its homelessness service system in order to effectively support the prevention and minimisation of homelessness across the life course in the future?

In this chapter, we propose a range of measures to make the homelessness service system more effective. These are possible options towards reconfiguring the homelessness service system that seek to end homelessness in Australia and answer the Inquiry's overall question:

How can the homelessness service system be redesigned and implemented to be effective for different groups across the life course?

The application of a systems thinking approach in this research has generated new insights into homelessness through a focus on which agents are able to effect change, and the ways they can be mobilised. We are proposing a large-scale reconfiguration of the Australian homelessness service system. Some parts of our proposal are being trialled in other countries, and others are already being trialled in Australia in selected locales, but there is no one location where all our proposed policy development options are being implemented. Our prevention-focussed proposal has been designed specifically for federally-governed Australia.

The proposed reconfiguration involves smarter use of funding integration. It is likely that many parts of our proposals would not involve additional funding in the large part, except for the critical need for an adequate supply of affordable and suitable accommodation for people who are homeless or are at risk of homelessness.

4.1 Changing the way we think about the homelessness service system

As previous chapters have illustrated, homelessness is a complex issue that requires a sophisticated response.

In Australia, how we seek to address homelessness is further complicated by our federal system, with three levels of government – the Australian Government, state and territory governments, and local governments – each holding different and sometimes overlapping responsibilities. As a result, we have eight loosely connected state and territory approaches to homelessness, each with different aims, governance and history. Federal funding for both homelessness services and income support represents a connecting thread, but it is a very loose thread and one that has not been used with strategic intent.

Our homelessness service system is also a victim of its history, with its origins in 19th century charitable institutions. It can be difficult to break away from the inertia that results from a myriad of actors and a somewhat chaotic system of small-scale and often disconnected services. Many agencies delivering homelessness services have a focus on other issues – assisting women fleeing violence in the home, supporting young people, and so on – and this makes it difficult to find common ground when discussing the future of the sector and the potential for reform.

Perhaps most importantly, the existing homelessness service system is oriented toward a crisis response. It is overwhelmed by demand that it cannot, and does not seek to, reduce. The existing system suffers from 'choke points', with homelessness services unable to take on more homeless people in crisis, let alone initiate early intervention and prevention measures. These 'choke points' lead to greater homelessness and increased demand for homelessness crisis services. There is a notable absence of early intervention services and models of care that seek to act early to reduce the numbers entering homelessness. In reality, many human service agencies are active in this space, but their efforts are not integrated into the program logic of homelessness supports.

We need to think about homelessness and the homelessness service system differently.

Most critically, homelessness is a problem that can be solved in Australia.

The solution is not easy, but a solution or set of solutions can be achieved. Other countries such as Norway and Finland have demonstrated that a fundamental change in approach can dramatically reduce, and even eliminate, homelessness.

This fundamental change in approach, based on findings from our research in Australia and from what appears to be working effectively overseas, includes:

- a move towards a focus on homelessness prevention and early intervention
- a move to Housing First approaches, and away from crisis accommodation
- the active involvement of existing homelessness services in reshaping the sector to deliver agreed outcomes for, and on behalf of, governments
- an adequate supply of social and affordable housing to meet Australia's needs
- a local place-based service system.

4.2 Homelessness prevention and early intervention

4.2.1 The current homelessness service system is crisis-driven

Our research found that the existing homelessness service system is predominantly a crisis response to homelessness.

To shift away from this self-defeating mode of crisis response, our research found the need for:

- assertive outreach
- ease of access into the system
- a set of processes that create prevention and early intervention platforms
- system integration
- the provision of local services that keep people in place and connected to their communities
- the delivery of culturally appropriate services for Indigenous Australians.

A reformed homelessness service system must also take into account – and seek to emulate – the positive impact of pathbreaking approaches around the 'duty to assist', and the COSS scheme in Geelong, Victoria, which were discussed in Chapters 2 and 3.

As a way of facilitating a shift to homelessness prevention and early intervention, we are proposing:

- a changing role for universal welfare services and for SHSs
- a new, integrated National Homelessness Initiative
- new funding partnership arrangements
- adopting a 'Housing First' approach which, for any homelessness service system to work effectively, would require an adequate supply of long-term affordable and social housing that is appropriate, secure and safe
- an enhanced role for universal welfare services in their awareness of, and engagement with homelessness, where they adopt a 'first to know, first to act' approach by:
 - screening all clients of welfare services to assess for risk of homelessness
 - seeking to prevent homelessness through the direct provision of assistance and brokerage funding
 - referring to an SHS when necessary for assistance into Housing First programs or, if necessary, crisis accommodation.

4.2.2 A changing role for universal welfare services and specialist homelessness services

As illustrated in Figure 7, we propose a reconfiguration of the institutional structure of the homelessness service system to effect a move towards focusing on prevention.

The focus here is not on SHSs but rather on universal welfare services. This would involve innovation in policy by instigating a 'duty to assist' for universal agencies such as income support, health services, education, justice, community services and employment and training services. The duty would involve screening for homelessness (asking all clients questions regarding their housing situation), brokerage funding to assist clients to maintain existing housing or access new housing, and referral to SHSs and Housing First agencies, when necessary. Outcomes associated with the 'duty to assist' would be reportable to COAG.

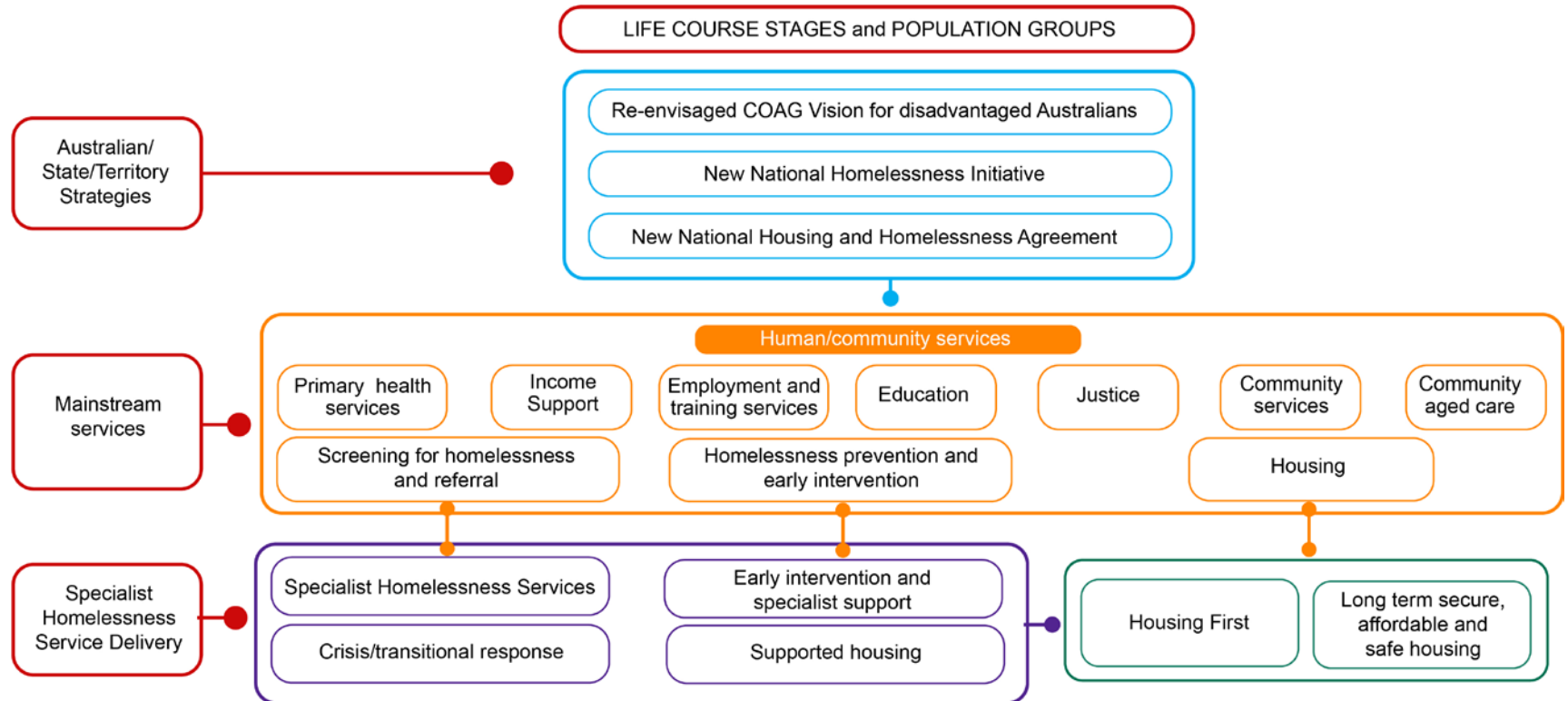
Universal welfare agencies are often the first point of contact for people who are homeless, or at risk of homelessness, and so they should accept the necessity of a 'first to know, first to act' mandate. These agencies have an important potential role in preventing homelessness, early intervention, assessment and referral.

Under this arrangement, the role of SHSs would be modified to one of homelessness prevention first and foremost, with crisis accommodation the solution of last resort. They would focus on arranging transfer into, and providing suitable outreach support to, Housing First schemes run by community housing providers; or helping clients to access long-term suitable and affordable independent accommodation.

Currently SHSs are understood to be those funded through the Specialist Homelessness Service program and provide crisis and transitional accommodation to some of those who seek assistance. In many ways, this definition represents an administrative convenience – one which continues to support the established (and relatively ineffective) homelessness service system. We advocate for a fundamental reconsideration of how the sector is defined and identified, with individual agencies funded to provide homelessness prevention solution, including support for those at risk and experiencing homelessness, rather than being funded to deliver housing. In our proposal, SHSs would take on less assessment and manage less crisis accommodation, but would have an enhanced role in providing outreach support to those in Housing First and Staying Home Leaving Violence schemes. The corollary of this proposal is that social housing providers – including public housing agencies – would have a new mandate to generate housing opportunities into which those at risk of homelessness could move. This proposal takes into account the international and national success of both of these schemes, a move towards preventing homelessness, and the success of outreach-based support. In much of our analysis, the role of feedback loops, levers and agents to recognise problems and identify potential solutions points directly to the important role of reflexivity (reflecting on what is working and what isn't) and reciprocity (involving Indigenous and non-Indigenous) people in the whole process, rather than treating them as passive recipients of services that focus on crisis response rather than prevention).

4. How might Australia reconfigure its homelessness service system in order to effectively support the prevention and minimisation of homelessness across the life course?

Figure 7: A blueprint for reconfiguring the institutional structure of the homelessness service system



Source: Authors.

We propose too that we should sever the link between experiencing DFV, and women and children becoming homeless. Although refuge and other crisis accommodation for women and children will continue to be funded through homelessness funding agreements, we propose that other funding streams should fund Staying Home Leaving Violence and other outreach DFV services. It is a historical anomaly that non-accommodation DFV services are funded through homelessness agreements, which leads to the assumption that DFV is dealt with by removing women and children from their homes (Spinney 2012):

“Integrative approaches such as Staying Home Leaving Violence-type schemes have an important role to play in preventing homelessness for women and children who have experienced domestic and family violence, and that this is true for women living in very different situations in very different areas. Australia should move to the provision of homelessness prevention schemes that are as extensive as the current provision of refuge and crisis accommodation.”

4.2.3 Elaboration on lever points in a reconfigured homelessness service system

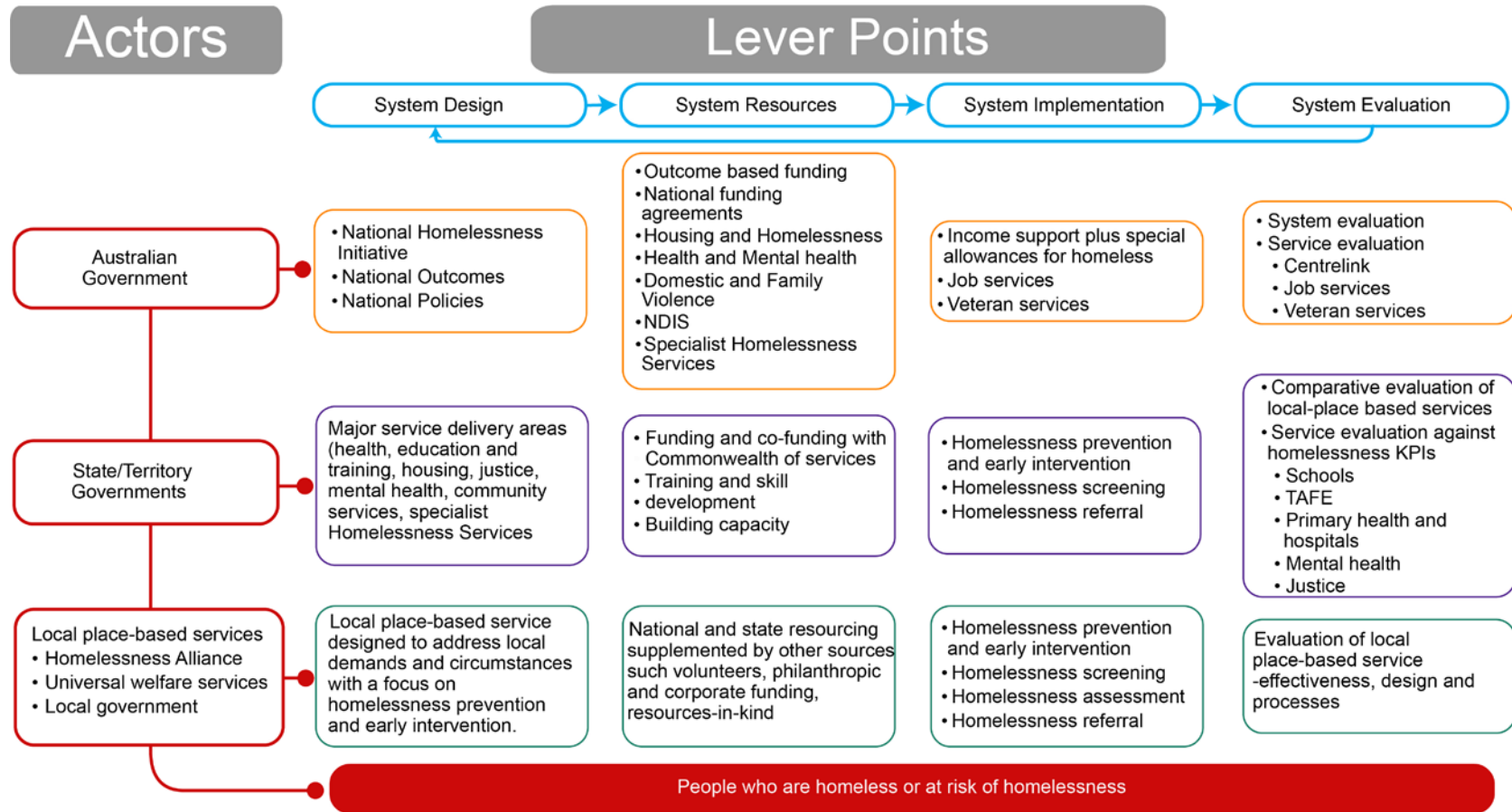
As well as these proposals, there were other learnings from our research that we believe should be used to enable the Australian homelessness service system to become more effective. As foreshadowed in Figure 5, Figure 8 elaborates further details of the proposed reconfiguration of the homelessness service system. It illustrates the lever points and actors, including proposed alliances between government and purchased services, as well as the ‘duty to assist’ role of universal welfare services already discussed. Together, our proposals seek to remove the ‘siloed’ delivery of services, and instead utilise the Indigenous Australian perspective of a connected ‘whole’.

Figure 8 illustrates our conceptualisation of how system design, system resources, system implementation and system evaluation could be the points at which the key levers (discovered via the research) could be utilised. The figure also shows the actors with the potential to move these levers to bring about positive change. For many of the levers, it is governments that must take a role in bringing about a reconfiguration of the homelessness service system. Reconfiguration of the homelessness service system cannot come solely from within and will require constant evaluation until the system is working as effectively as it can.

It is possible to conceptualise Figure 8 with people who are homeless, or at risk of homelessness, at the top. We chose not to do this because our findings demonstrate that the most effective homelessness service systems, such as in Finland, have seen the positive impact of government-led integrated housing strategies filter down into innovative policy and practice, leading to a reduction in homelessness. Individuals and families who are homeless or at risk of becoming homeless are not responsible for instigating change; that is the responsibility of the governments who represent them.

4. How might Australia reconfigure its homelessness service system in order to effectively support the prevention and minimisation of homelessness across the life course?

Figure 8: A blueprint for a reconfigured homelessness service system detailing actors and lever points



Source: Authors.

4.3 Local place-based service systems

Conceptualising the homelessness service system at the local level reframes how to imagine the provision of services. This line of system thinking shifts away from state-wide programs implemented in (top-down) specified locations to more place-based approaches which 'work within a geographical community, mobilising community stakeholders and leaders to address specific issues and social problems in their community' (MacKenzie and Hand 2019).

One perspective for delivering a place-based reform of services is collective impact, defined as 'the commitment of a group of important actors from different sectors to a common agenda for solving a specific social problem' (Kania and Kramer 2011: 36–41). While the goal of collaboration in the human services sector is not new, collective impact initiatives are distinctly different from the status quo of programs and comprise five core conditions: a common agenda; shared measurements; continuous communication; mutually reinforcing activities; and backbone support.

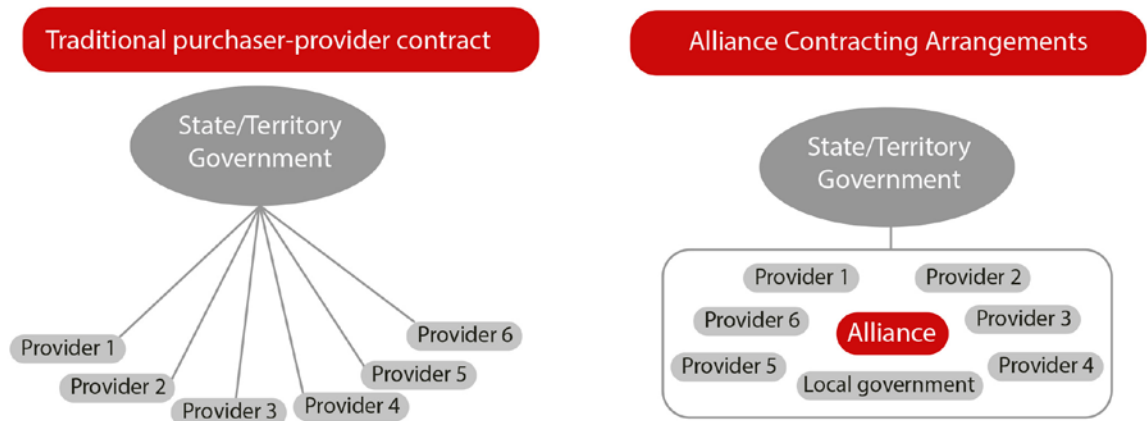
An Australian example is the Community Partnerships Initiative (Victorian Premier 2018) that was designed as a place-based initiative to bring together community, government and service providers to address childhood vulnerability and foster safe and supportive environments for children and families. This was place-based in that the partnerships were to be constructed with, and by, local communities to build resilience, increase participation, empower families and improve access to services. The Victorian Government issued a tender for a lead organisation to drive and support the local rollout of the Community Partnerships Initiative. Subsequently, the lead agency was to identify four interested communities in which to establish these partnerships. The process was commenced but the appointment of a lead agency was terminated after the tender responses were received.

There is some debate about the prime contracting model of funding community services. Advocates such as the Brotherhood of St Laurence argue that having a large prime contractor that sub-contracts to other service providers improves the capacity to scale up innovation, fosters partnerships and inter-organisational collaborations and may improve coordination. The model is not without its critics. A paper by Gallet, O'Flynn et. al. (2015) cautions that the prime contractor model introduces a new layer of complexity into the various actors involved with developing and delivering community services and could be an attempt by governments to transfer risk from government to the private sector. A prominent Australian example of this model is Communities for Children, in which government funds a not-for-profit purchaser that manages multiple sub-contracts for not-for-profit, for-profit and government direct service providers. This example is place-based and incorporates a prime contractor funding model within the community.

However, the instigation of contracting alliances (such as that currently being rolled out in Glasgow, Scotland) between providers of purchased homelessness services and government, has the potential to further increase the effectiveness of the homelessness service system. The Glasgow example (detailed in Chapter 3) involves SHS and outreach services working together in a collaborative alliance to improve ease of access to services by clients. As demonstrated in Figure 9, in this model, services come together to contract with government for the work they undertake. Rather than having to arrange contracts with all service providers (there are 1,500 SHSs in Australia), one contract is made between the alliance and government.

4. How might Australia reconfigure its homelessness service system in order to effectively support the prevention and minimisation of homelessness across the life course?

Figure 9: Alliance contracting arrangements



Source: Adapted from Glasgow Alliance to End Homelessness (2017).

It is early days for the Alliance in Glasgow; the contract was only recently awarded and joint working has not yet commenced at the time of writing. However, similar alliances have successfully run in other universal welfare agencies, such as health and education in the United Kingdom.

We propose that the use of alliances in Australia has the potential to make the homelessness service system more effective by:

- addressing the need for integration of services and improved service coordination
- creating prevention and early intervention platforms
- increasing flexibility of service delivery
- simplifying access to services.

Our research determined that all of these are levers with the potential to improve the effectiveness of the homelessness service system.

4.4 An integrated national homelessness initiative

We envisage that the reconfiguring of the Australian homelessness service system will be part of an enhanced, shared COAG vision for disadvantaged Australians that seeks to prevent people from becoming homeless. This would increase funding for those on Newstart and other income support so that people in receipt of benefits are able to afford safe and suitable long-term accommodation. A new, integrated national homelessness initiative and new funding agreements would give effect to a fundamental change in approach to homelessness through:

- a move towards a focus on prevention of homelessness
- a move to Housing First approaches away from crisis accommodation
- provision of an adequate supply of social and affordable housing to meet Australia's needs.

We also propose the development of new National Housing, Homelessness, DFV and other linked funding agreements that seek to make the homelessness service system more effective by:

1. ensuring an innovative supply of long-term suitable affordable housing for all stages of the life course
2. prioritising Housing First rather than crisis accommodation approaches
3. encouraging place based alliances of purchased prevention, early intervention, crisis and rapid rehousing homelessness services
4. increasing spending on Staying Home Leaving Violence schemes
5. fund a knowledge exchange to share innovative practice in policy and practice, and
6. ensure that agencies provide Indigenous Australians with culturally appropriate services.

4.5 Policy development implications

Potential reconfiguration of the homelessness services system is a complicated matter. Different parts of the homelessness service system are integral to each other and this research is not able to determine how our proposed levers will have unintended impacts.

However the research has brought to the fore that homelessness is a problem to which workable solutions can be found. It has also shown that the way Australia is dealing with homelessness now is not effective in terms of providing the best solutions for people who find themselves homeless or in preventing them becoming homeless again in the future. Change to the current system must occur and this research highlights some of the ways that this might be managed.

Our key findings and potential ways forward will have implications for:

- a re-envisaged COAG vision for disadvantaged Australians
- a whole-of-government commitment to the redesign of the homelessness service system in collaboration with SHSs towards homelessness prevention
- the take-up by universal welfare services of their new role in screening for risk of homelessness, providing assistance through brokerage funding and advice, and referral to SHSs and Housing First agencies
- an acceptance by SHSs of the decreasing role of crisis accommodation
- an acceptance of increased role of Housing First by community housing providers and SHSs, and
- A commitment to alliance-style contracting by governments, SHSs and other purchased services.

5. Policy development options

Coming to an understanding of homelessness is about recognising that it is a multi-dimensional situation shaped by a complex set of multiple risk factors (Parker and Fopp 2004). There are different triggers and solutions at different stages of the life course, but homelessness can be prevented, dealt with, and ended.

The critical policy concern that has led this Inquiry is:

How can the homelessness service system be redesigned and implemented to be effective across different groups across the life course?

Up until now there has not been an adequate understanding of the effectiveness of the homelessness service system: how the different parts of the system interact, how homelessness services interact with other universal welfare services, and how these aspects could be improved to better meet the needs of homeless people. This Inquiry, including the three projects, has increased understanding on these issues.

The results of this study clearly indicate that the current configuration of the homelessness service system in Australia is not meeting the needs of many of the people who are homeless or of those who might be prevented from becoming homeless in the future. Importantly, however, we have established that homelessness prevention measures can radically reduce the numbers of homeless people in our society. In our research, we found that the current Australian homelessness service system is still oriented towards crisis responses; however, many countries are now innovatively orienting their wider service systems towards prevention.

5.1 Why should the homelessness service system be redesigned to be more effective?

Structural factors create the conditions within which homelessness will occur, but people with personal problems are more vulnerable to these adverse social and economic trends than others. Women are more vulnerable than men to poverty in Australia because they have a weaker position in the labour market. They are therefore disadvantaged in their ability to access housing, and their experiences of the homelessness and housing systems are different from those of men. Children are very vulnerable to the trauma that experiencing homelessness brings, not least because schooling and friendships are disrupted, as well as other links to communities such as sporting and cultural activities. The loss of their home means that the family will face considerable social and personal disruption, as well as financial disadvantage (Chung, Kennedy et al. 2000).

Our proposals for change aim at preventing people, wherever possible, from experiencing the lifelong disadvantage that becoming homeless brings. The Inquiry Reports together provide a blueprint for a move to a more effective homelessness service system. We have brought together a range of homelessness service system innovations from around the world and, using the results of our fieldwork, looked to see which of these might work effectively in Australia to address the areas of ineffectiveness that our research participants experienced. The call for change also acknowledges that the homelessness service system in Australia is complex: there are many actors, working across a multitude of funding programs, targetted at diverse groups, with a highly variable set of resources and objectives. In addition, the homelessness service system appears to be at arms length from the primary instrument for the delivery of income support – Centrelink. Critically, the primary form of assistance is provided after – not before – a person has become homeless, when the cost and complexity of providing solutions has become more acute.

5.2 The value of using a systems thinking approach

Throughout the research we used a systems thinking lens to conceptualise how the homelessness service system could become more effective. This allowed us to identify the key actors, feedback loops and levers in the homelessness services system, how service provision is operationalised on the ground, how system elements interact and some intended and unintended consequences of the current system (and for whom). Importantly, it allowed us to step beyond a conventional analysis focussed on identifying the failings of the current homelessness service system and instead consider how to bring about positive change. This fundamental work helped inform an understanding about what is effective and ineffective in the current Australian homelessness service system.

Implementing a ‘systems thinking’ approach involves the following processes (Stroh and Zurcher 2012: 4):

1. building a strong foundation for change by engaging multiple stakeholders to identify an initial vision and picture of current reality
2. engaging stakeholders to explain their often competing views of why a chronic, complex problem persists despite people’s best efforts to solve it
3. integrating the diverse perspectives into a map that provides a more complete picture of the system and root causes of the problem
4. supporting people to see how their well-intended efforts to solve the problem often make the problem worse
5. committing to a compelling vision of the future and supportive strategies that can lead to sustainable, system-wide change.

Systems thinking also allowed us to identify the role of Indigenous methodology and to combine the two. Our application of this combined approach has generated new insights into the effectiveness of the homelessness service system through a focus on the levers that can create influence.

5.3 Key findings

Homelessness is a complex social problem that intersects with a range of other social issues, particularly poverty, income support, housing, health and access to jobs, training and education. As a complex social problem, it requires a complex response, not only from SHSs but also from universal welfare services such as income support, housing, health, mental health, justice, community aged care, employment and education services.

Despite its complexity, homelessness can be prevented. There are solutions to homelessness such that it can be virtually eradicated. Other countries, particularly Norway and Finland, have made dramatic reductions in homelessness.

The starting point for a new, integrated national homelessness initiative is first, a focus on the rights and needs of homeless people, and second, a commitment by governments at all levels to provide a workable solution that adds to national wellbeing, prosperity and resilience. Indigenous Australians must be placed at centre of this effort if there is to be real improvement in homelessness nationally, and within their nations.

Ending homelessness will require a high level of commitment from all tiers of government, from universal welfare services, from SHSs and from the community. It requires them to work together. It requires a continuous and constant integrated initiative over many years. It requires a 'Housing First' approach and a funding strategy. However, while reform will bring with it short-term costs, it will also deliver public sector savings in the justice, health, education and social services portfolios in the long-term. The cost of homelessness is high, with many of the financial imposts borne by other sectors of government expenditure such as health and justice.

Throughout this report, policy development options for configuring the Australian homelessness service system have been developed based on our research findings. We envisage that the reconfiguration of the Australian homelessness service system to become more effective will involve the following:

- an enhanced shared COAG vision for disadvantaged Australians which seeks to prevent people from becoming homeless
- increased income support payments so that people in receipt of benefits are able to afford safe and suitable long-term accommodation
- new national homelessness initiative and funding agreements
- a move towards a focus on prevention of homelessness
- a move to Housing First approaches and away from crisis accommodation, and
- provision of an adequate supply of social and affordable housing to meet Australia's needs.

A new integrated national homeless initiative supported by and linked with housing, DFV and other funding agreements will make the homelessness service system more effective by:

- ensuring an innovative supply of long-term suitable affordable housing for all stages of the life course
- prioritising Housing First rather than crisis accommodation approaches
- enhancing the role of universal welfare services in their 'duty to assist', where they adopt a 'first to know, first to act' approach by:
 - screening all clients to assess for risk of homelessness
 - seeking to prevent homelessness by use of assistance and brokerage funding
 - referring to an SHS when necessary for assistance into Housing First or, if necessary, crisis accommodation.
- developing local place-based alliances between government and purchased services
- encouraging place-based alliances of purchased prevention, early intervention, crisis and rapid rehousing homelessness services
- increasing spending on Staying Home Leaving Violence schemes
- funding a knowledge exchange to share innovative practice in policy and practice
- ensuring that agencies provide Indigenous Australians with culturally appropriate services.

5.4 Implementation

This is perhaps the first time such a wide-ranging suite of policy development options for the reconfiguration of the homelessness service system has been brought together in Australia. Further research is required to establish how our suggested key levers could work together, or against each other, to making the homelessness service system more effective.

One of the ways this could be done is by piloting a series of organisational alliances to end homelessness in each state and territory. Likewise, specific geographical locations could pilot universal welfare agencies trialling the proposed 'duty to assist' by screening, and assisting, their clients at risk of homelessness, and referring those who they are unable to help through brokerage funds and housing advice.

5.4.1 Different priorities for different stages

At the same time, work could begin on other key levers to mitigate the effects of homelessness including those that we found are more particular to some life course stages than others. These are young people, families, older people and Indigenous Australians:

- Young people tend to keep to a fairly tight geographical area, and place-based solutions are needed.
- For families, DFV continues to be a major cause of homelessness.
- Older women are a fairly new, and fast growing, cohort to face homelessness, and provision to prevent this is needed urgently.

More details on these differing priorities are included in the individual project reports.

5.4.2 Indigenous research methodologies

An important finding of this Inquiry is that Indigenous research methodologies can be effectively augmented with systems thinking approaches to provide improved qualitative research methodologies and improved research findings for both Indigenous and non-Indigenous homelessness and housing research, and that this is transferable to other studies.

Indigenous research methodologies can help everyone, not just Indigenous Australians. This can be achieved through recognition of the key elements of Indigenous methodologies, such as connection, reflexivity and reciprocity.

Acknowledgment and recognition of the important role of culture throughout the whole process of designing and implementing a redesigned homelessness service system is vital in order for it to function effectively.

5.5 A new orientation towards early invention and prevention of homelessness

This report is the latest in an Inquiry into the homelessness service system and how it works for people at different stages of the life course. Together these reports build a case for major change and provide a blueprint for that change. What is true of Australia, as elsewhere, is that the cost of providing crisis accommodation is often more expensive than providing housing support. However, it must also be recognised that in order for any homelessness service system to work effectively there needs to be an adequate appropriate supply of long-term affordable and social housing.

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Australian Housing and Urban Research Institute

Level 12, 460 Bourke Street

Melbourne VIC 3000

Australia


+61 3 9660 2300

information@ahuri.edu.au

ahuri.edu.au

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