



## **Core and Cluster expansion project**

Recommendations

January 2022

Homelessness NSW (HNSW) is a not-for-profit organisation that operates as a peak agency for its member organisations to end homelessness across NSW. Our members include small, locally based community organisations, multiservice agencies with a regional reach and large state-wide service providers.



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# Introduction

## The demand for housing



Domestic violence remains the main cause of women's homelessness in NSW. Since the outbreak of Covid-19, emerging data and multiple reports have shown that all types of domestic and family violence has intensified.<sup>1</sup>

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women are over three times more likely to be victims of domestic and family violence. The true extent of women's and children's homelessness because of domestic violence is unknown. It is generally agreed that official statistics are likely to significantly underestimate the scale of the problem.



Research undertaken by Equity Economics in 2021 indicated that in NSW up to 2,402 women currently living with a violent partner who previously left that partner only to return because they had nowhere to live or could not afford alternative accommodation. A further 2,410 women were homeless because they could not find secure and permanent housing after leaving a violent partner<sup>2</sup>

In NSW crisis and transitional accommodation provided by Specialist Homelessness Services (SHS) remains the primary response for people experiencing homelessness. Despite this investment women and children continue to experience homelessness due to an absence of suitable, stable, long-term housing.

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<sup>1</sup> Equity Economics 2021; Rebuilding for Women's Economic Security.

Investing in Social Housing /

<sup>2</sup> Equity Economics 2021, Nowhere to go: the benefits of providing long-term social housing to women that have experienced domestic and family violence, prepared for Everybody's Home: Housing for all Australians.

## The problem with the current system



Over the past decade the NSW Government has developed several programs that aim to alleviate the pressure on the social housing system, whilst assisting women and children to stay safe. This has comprised of a 24/7 Domestic Violence Response Enhancement (DVRE), Staying Home Leaving Violence (SHLV), designed to keep women safe at home after the removal of the perpetrator, and Rent Choice Start Safely short-term private rental assistance subsidy.

For many women and especially those with young and/or traumatised children there are inherent problems with this response system due to chronic shortage of available / affordable private rental housing in suitable areas, competition, and inadequate income support. For this reason, many women experiencing homelessness are supported via crisis accommodation. However, the absence of appropriate exit/long term accommodation means that many women return to violent perpetrators, or remain homeless.

## A systems design approach



It is evident that the SHS sector does not provide a functioning mechanism for moving people along a housing pathway. Women's refuges provide a distinctive service that provides immediate support and a place of safety for to women and their children escaping domestic violence. Whilst this works well in many areas, the overall system is severely impacted by the scarcity of appropriate, safe, affordable, and sustainable housing that is needed to achieve long-term positive outcomes. Analysis undertaken for the Everybody's Home campaign for the NSW context estimates that 4,812 social housing units are required for women feeling domestic violence<sup>3</sup>. Within this context the need for more longer-term

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<sup>3</sup> Equity Economics 2021; Rebuilding for Women's

housing is clear, and that building additional crisis refuges will not meet this need.

Whilst the Government announcement to build 75 new core and cluster services places some constraint on service design, there remains potential to improve upon the current service system.

The Core and Cluster expansion project provides an exciting opportunity to utilise additional funding to focus on the foundational elements that are required to support a coherent housing and homelessness system in NSW; that being the supply of suitable housing for women and children, based on the following principles:

- **A flexible mixed model comprising supportive housing and crisis care** that does not place referral criteria on admission or restriction on lengths of stay. (as this varies according to individual support needs and the availability of appropriate long-term accommodation)
- **Pool new and existing funding** to provide a whole of housing response involving onsite caseworkers co-located with outreach (DVRE) workers, Start Safely housing officers, WDVCS workers, perpetrator management.
- **Provision of flexible brokerage** to support women to access sustainable accommodation. Funds may be used to overcome the barriers to access housing such as additional security measures, school related expenses, furniture and white goods purchases, car repairs etc.



## THE BENEFITS OF PROVIDING LONG-TERM SOCIAL HOUSING TO SURVIVORS OF DOMESTIC AND FAMILY VIOLENCE

Domestic and family violence makes a woman's home the least safe place she can be, and getting to safety often means finding somewhere new to live. But a lack of available social and affordable housing drives many women to return to their perpetrators and the risk of violence, or into homelessness.

# Recommendations

It is important to recognise the enduring impact of the Going Home Staying Home reforms, and ensure care is taken to support the current service system. This will involve working with existing providers in communities to harness their expertise, strong community

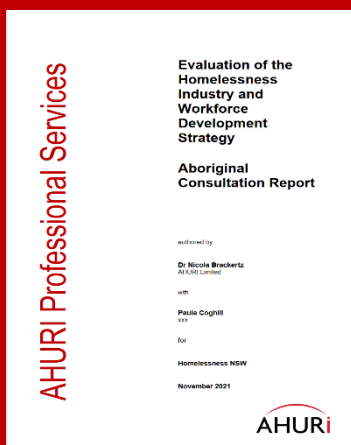
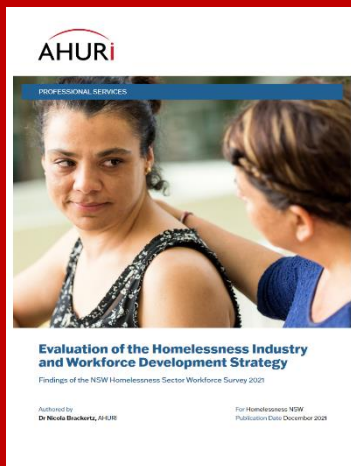
## 1. **Prioritise supportive housing**

- 1.1 Utilise new funding to increase the supportive housing element within the core and cluster model. This will provide better outcome for client by meeting demand; and managing workforce issues as staffing component required is lower. It would also enable the model to potentially incorporate a suite of supports and service delivery including housing, WDV CAS support, Start Safely and trauma informed crisis and long term support. This approach would allow 75 additional models to be delivered that value add to the existing service system.
- 1.2 The Homelessness sector has always been very separate from the Housing sector – A mixed model approach needs to be understood as a significant reform with associated risks. It is important to consider lessons learned from the NSW Together Home evaluation in this context, in addition to international approaches to contracting support and housing/assets separately. The role of Asset Management and Tenancy Management needs to be clearly defined, funded and considered in the current context of a range of stakeholders including Community Housing Providers, Land and Housing Corporation and local councils.

1.3 Support delivery needs to be independent and accountable to DCJ as the contract manager rather than the Asset Manager, and providers need to meet current requirements of SHS Programs (e.g., ASES, CIMS, Outcomes etc) This is required to avoid the creation of a 2-tier system. Funding agreements must include maintenance budgets and support for SHSs to become accredited providers.

## 2. Increase Aboriginal service capacity

2.1 The recent Homelessness Industry and Workforce Development Strategy Workforce Evaluation, undertaken by AHURI on behalf of Homelessness NSW, identified that 30% of people accessing SHS's identify as Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander. At least one third of the services should be Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations. Survey data shows that NSW SHS organisations employ relatively few Aboriginal staff, and even fewer are in managerial, leadership or executive positions. The experiences of Aboriginal SHS providers are captured in the separate Aboriginal Consultation Report and provide important learnings for future service design. It is critical that new funding supports building the capacity of existing ACCOs, and supports increasing the Aboriginal workforce through fully funded apprenticeships, improved training, funding for identified positions, better pay and opportunities for on-the-job professional development.





### **3. Identify and strategically manage data collection**

3.1 The number of women experiencing homelessness resulting from domestic and family violence is well documented, and the requirement for additional social housing cannot be disputed. Data mainly focuses on the point in time of leaving abuse i.e. the number of women utilising housing products and the number of women assisted by SHS's (including Domestic Violence Response Enhancement, Start Safety product activations) The problem with this approach is that it does not fully examine women's journeys between different points in the housing and homelessness system, or identify the long-term outcomes. As a result data relating to housing and homelessness does not provide sufficient insight to inform the development of a coherent evidence-based system. A demand analysis based on BOCSAR DFV stats and ABS Women's Safety stats is required. Census data doesn't capture sufficient information and AIHW data is service driven (although turn away could be analysed for expansion of existing services)

3.2 Robust data and analysis is essential to informing the required locations for the 75 'new' services. Confirmation is required that the 86 existing crisis services are in areas of high demand, and/or there are a limited number of areas that need crisis accommodation that don't already have a service.

3.3 There is a need to undertake a detailed analysis of DCJ housing, homelessness, and include all

relevant stakeholders including DFV services, CHPs, LAHC/Housing/AHO, Local Councils, Aboriginal Lands Councils, community services and other community stakeholders (including charities that may have land & other things to offer)

#### **4. Participate in meaningful consultation and policy discussions**



4.1 There is a need to work in partnership with service users, local communities and sector peaks and advocacy organisations to ensure that the proposed model and service provisions are relevant. Ensuring communities are in the driving seat the first and foremost essential component of successful commissioning. This will ensure that any resulting frameworks and funding agreements are developed to align with needs.<sup>4</sup>

#### **5. Establish a funding structure that supports good commissioning**

5.1 It is essential that funding is place-based and ring-fenced to provide long term stability, and that this is maintained in the longer term. Funding for a minimum 5-year period will provide improved financial security, allow for more effective business planning and governance as well as reducing the administrative burden on services.

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<sup>4</sup> Goodwin, S.; Stears, M; Riboldi, M.; Fishwick, E.;

Fennis, L. "All together: A new future for commissioning human services in New South Wales," Sydney Policy Lab, University of Sydney (April 2020)

5.2 It is recommended that funding should be utilised to upgrade/improve the existing DFV crisis accommodation and not create a 2-tier system. Funding needs to be rolled out in place-based way – not through a centralised generalised tender process.

5.3 Going Home Staying Home saw the creation of new contracts with separate funding streams for DFV, youth and generalist. Several services have contracts for all three streams, or a mix. Given the significant increase in DFV funding, it would be useful to review the current arrangements to understand how the entire DFV funding can be used to support women and children escaping DFV and decide whether funding streams need to be created – and then understand how this might be done with the least impost on the current service system.

## **6. Develop a workforce strategy to support implementation**

6.1 The SHS sector, and DFV sector, has an ageing workforce. The Industry and Workforce Development Strategy saw the creation of a Capability Framework that identifies skill level and qualifications of 4 tiers of workers. The supporting L & D Framework provides training in the context of the Capability Framework, comprising generalist

training for all SHS sector workers with additional specialist DFV training for DFV providers. Many services have reported they are struggling to recruit workers since end of first lockdown in 2020 due to high level of stress and poor pay. Feedback from previous workforce surveys has identified limited career development opportunities acts as a major barrier to retaining staff (i.e., nowhere to progress to once in a service that isn't outside the sector).

A workforce strategy should be developed that looks at: recruiting frontline workers from social work, providing incentives/support for people to study social work or Cert IV community services with guaranteed job at end, leadership training and support for succession planning and looking at how to expand career opportunities in community sector. Whilst low pay will remain an issue and opportunity exists to provide career incentives to SHS workers.

## Next Steps

Homelessness NSW holds concerns that the new funding is being developed within unrealistic timescales and limited consultation. It is recommended that DCJ convenes a monitoring group to develop a plan to implement and review progress. This group could be independently chaired, with secretariat support from DCJ. Members of the group should be representative of the domestic violence, housing and homelessness sector, Aboriginal communities and people with lived expertise.