



SACOSS

*South Australian Council
of Social Service*

**Submission to *Which Way Home*
Homelessness Green Paper**

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South Australian Council of Social Service
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The South Australian Council of Social Service (SACOSS)

SACOSS is the peak body for social services in South Australia. SACOSS is a not-for-profit independent organisation and our members represent a wide range of interests in social welfare, health and community services. SACOSS is part of a national network assisting low-income and disadvantaged people. SACOSS and its members have a *vision of justice, opportunity and shared wealth for all South Australians*.

This submission has been informed by the *Blueprint to eradicate poverty*, our long term anti poverty plan for South Australia as well as consultation with the SACOSS Policy Council¹ which informs and shapes SACOSS social justice policy positions.

¹ The Policy Council is a group of 40 elected members representing the broader interests of the non government sector in South Australia.

SACOSS broadly supports the general principles outlined in the Green Paper; however we would like to provide our support for the Australian Council of Social Service (ACOSS) assessment of each of the principles. We also support the additional principles as articulated by ACOSS.

Fundamentally SACOSS believes that human rights principles should underpin the national response to homelessness. In particular, we highlight the inappropriateness of policy proposals which make access to accommodation conditional upon certain kinds of conduct. A human rights approach which prohibits discrimination on the basis of homelessness or socio-economic status would also enshrine the responsibilities of public services to provide assistance on a universal, non-discriminatory basis.

In developing an effective response to homelessness, the structural and individual causes of homelessness must be understood as well as the complex interaction between them. While it is evident that Australia is currently failing to comprehensively address homelessness, it does not simply follow that SAAP has failed. As a response program to the needs of people who are homeless, SAAP (as it is currently structured) can not be expected to either prevent homelessness or to house people permanently. A truly successful system would include many other aspects, not just a crisis program.

SACOSS submits that an effective response to homelessness is one which most effectively invests in prevention and early intervention, and recognises interactions between existing structures and policy settings, and their impact on homelessness. In particular, this must include a review of social security law and policy, affordable housing policies and funding and a review of the impact of the criminal justice system and mental health systems on homelessness.

SACOSS supports the concerns that none of the proposed options effectively achieve the complementary goals of strengthening homelessness services and enhancing the mainstream service system response to prevent homelessness, intervene early and expand exit options. More specifically, a number of risks and limitations are in each option.

Option One increases the risks of people falling between population based service delivery streams and thus not having their needs appropriately met. It is likely to be a slow and disruptive reform process and assumes the ability of mainstream service systems to respond appropriately to those experiencing or at risk of homelessness.

Option Two, although a necessary part of any new response, is inadequate in the absence of mainstream service system improvements and an expansion in funding for public and community housing.

Option Three, by contrast, proposes the enhancement of mainstream services as an alternative to an expansion in the role of SAAP providers. This fails to recognise the unique strengths and capacities of the SAAP sector, its role in linking clients to other services, the greater effectiveness of longer support periods in achieving sustained outcomes and the mainstream service system's lack of capacity and experience in providing services to those who are homeless.

In light of the deficiencies of these three options, SACOSS supports the fourth option proposed by ACOSS, the five elements of this option are below and detailed commentary is contained in the ACOSS submission;

1. A substantial increase in the stock of public, community and other affordable housing;
2. A National Homelessness Strategy with goals and targets;
3. A new National Affordable Housing Agreement which includes housing and homelessness funding programs;
4. The enhancement of effective prevention and early intervention programs;
5. The enhancement of homelessness support services to meet existing need, provide longer term and post-crisis support and to increase case management and service brokering capacity.