



HOMELESS SERVICES ACTION PLAN

Fixing the chronic gap in support and services for our most vulnerable

For a wealthy nation like ours, there are too many people falling through the cracks. Every day hundreds of requests for basic shelter and vital support are left unmet – and service providers are overstretched and underfunded. It's time to fix this gap.

On any given night more than 105,000 Australians – or one in every 200 of us - are homeless, with almost 7000 sleeping rough.

More than a quarter of our homeless population are children under the age of 18. On census night almost 18,000 children under 12 were counted as homeless, 402 were sleeping rough.

Across Australia there are almost 1,500 agencies that provide specialist services to people experiencing homelessness or who are at risk of becoming homeless. Whilst more than 255,000 Australians used these services in 2011-12, there were 119,910 requests for services that went unmet. This equates to 329 unassisted requests every day in 2014-2015.ⁱⁱⁱ

Since the last Census, homelessness increased by 17% and the demand for services has surged. The services are overstretched and underfunded.

“There’s no future for me. No future whatsoever...I’ve had three domestic violence relationships, I’ve been abused as a child twice, I’ve never had ... I’ve asked so many times for help and I’ve never had it. I had an appointment with Homeswest the other day but I asked them, what chance have I got. And they actually stated to me they’re only just housing people from 2006”. – Butterfly, 2015ⁱⁱⁱ

On average 329 people are being turned away from services every day^{iv}.

Instead of supporting our most vulnerable and strengthening the safety net and services on the frontline, the government has made the life worse for the homeless by making brutal cuts to homelessness and housing affordability programs.

> FIXING THE FUNDING GAP

Homelessness can be a complex issue but the solution is simple: we need to match the funding for support services to the scale of need. We need an urgent solution to this crisis.

That’s why we’re announcing **our plan to double the current funding for specialist homelessness services in Australia for at least the next ten years.**

> BUDGET IMPLICATIONS

The Greens have calculated:

- Doubling federal funding for Specialist Homelessness Services provided under the original National Affordable Housing Agreement (and indexing the funding by 7%) would cost **\$507 million pa**
- Signing a new ten year National Partnership Agreement on Homelessness and doubling funding under the original Agreement would cost **\$320 million pa**

(This funding would be matched by the states, bringing the total Partnership Agreement to \$640 million pa)

The total federal commitment over the next ten years would be \$827 million pa, as part of a total package worth \$1.1 billion per year.

These funding commitments are made for at least 10 years.

> THE CURRENT GAPS IN FRONTLINE SERVICES

St Vincent de Paul report as many as one in five people seeking services across Australia are being turned away due to lack of resources^v. The most common unmet need is for accommodation – with 56% of all clients needing at least one type of accommodation service, but only 6% being provided with long term accommodation.

Domestic violence is still the main cause for homelessness but services can’t keep up.

One in every three people seeking help from homelessness services is due to domestic and family violence. 92, 000 of all people receiving assistance from homelessness agencies were escaping some form of domestic violence or family violence, over a quarter were children under 15 years old.^{vi}

Nationally, these figures have increased by 16% since 2011, and we are seeing an unprecedented level of demand on services that simply can’t keep up. Last year for example:

- 21% of clients needing emergency accommodation and 94% needing long term accommodation could not be assisted

- 50% mental health services requests were not met
- 50% disability services were unmet
- 52% of requests for legal services were unmet
- 23% of requests for incest or sexual assault services and 16% for trauma services were unmet
- 15% of requests for childcare were unmet; and
- 32% of employment and training services could not be provided^{vii}

People can become homeless – or be at risk of becoming homeless - for many reasons, ranging from sudden financial or housing difficulties, to more complex issues involving family breakdowns, health issues, and other causes of disadvantage.

Mental health services are one of the most common types of assistance requested but last year one quarter of all clients seeking mental health services such as psychiatric and psychological care were turned away (10,200 people).

“The term I’ve always used is it’s the pits. It’s cold, it’s damp, it’s lonely, it’s depressing, I don’t know how many adjectives you want to add - but it’s - it’s not good. You lose hope very quickly, as far as getting out. You don’t know what it is, and you live day by day”. – Jonathan, 2015.

There is also a large gap in services for drug and alcohol counselling, disability services, training and employment assistance, financial advice, gambling counselling, child specialist counseling, people leaving care or jail, and assistance to maintain tenancies. **On average in 15-27% of cases, the need for these services went unmet^{viii}.**

Groups with special interests, requiring substantial services over the long term, are overrepresented in the homelessness population. These include children and young people (43% of the homeless population, most often as a result of domestic and family violence), Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples (22% of the homeless population), families (33% of all homeless, the majority being single parent families), people with mental health issues (19%) and clients leaving health care and correctional facilities (4%).

Agencies providing services to these groups are in constant doubt over continued funding, struggling with extremely high caseloads, funding cuts, and are not able to provide the long term and intensive support needed throughout Australia.

This is unacceptable. It is *vital* to broaden the base of funding so money can go directly to frontline homelessness services.

That’s why we’re announcing our policy to double funding for specialist homelessness Services for the next ten years.

Doubling the funding to Australia’s specialist homeless services will provide for a more caring Australia, whilst ensuring job security for those delivering these essential services.

> WHAT’S THE CURRENT FUNDING FRAMEWORK?

*“There is no stewardship to make Australia better for all, no recognition of the economic damage being done”
–Youth Homelessness Roundtable, 2015.*

Under the National Affordable Housing Agreement (the NAHA) the commonwealth has provided about \$250 million annually for specialist homelessness support and accommodation services to 230,500 people (1:97 Australians) including 88,000 children^{ix}. But the level of funding has failed to keep up with demand, is not indexed, and lacks transparency and benchmarks for how states spend the money. Our plan fixes that.

In addition, the National Partnership Agreement on Homelessness (NPAH) introduced in 2009 and worth \$550m over four years (rising to \$159m per year in 2013-14) funds a further 180 programs and 3400 jobs, providing services to 80,000 people. It’s specifically aimed at new and innovative programs in prevention and early intervention, breaking the cycle of homelessness, and supporting rough sleepers, Indigenous Australians and victims of domestic violence, as well as projects like the Foyer model. Successive governments have failed to commit to a new Agreement, and it expires in 2017.

> THE ABBOTT-TURNBULL FAIL

“Our service to young people exiting detention linked housing and education and was a good news story with 82% of our boys still engaged in education 2 years on – yet our funding was axed on budget night. There needs to be a long term vision. The kids are saying where will we go?” - Youth Homelessness Roundtable, Perth 2015.

The Abbott-Turnbull government has failed to make life better for people who are homeless, and has made brutal cuts of almost \$600 million to homelessness and housing programs:

- Axed \$44m for new homelessness shelters and reduced funding for the NPAH
- Axed the National Homelessness Research Strategy
- De-funded peak bodies Homeless Australia & National Shelter
- Axed \$21m in grants to the homelessness sector
- Axed the Prime Minister’s Council on Homelessness
- Axed the National Rental Affordability Scheme
- Axed the Housing Help for Seniors pilot program
- Axed the First Home Saver Accounts scheme
- Axed the COAG Reform group on Housing Affordability

The Coalition have also refused to adopt the targets under the “Homelessness White Paper to halve homelessness by 2020 and provide services to all rough sleepers seeking them; and has no coherent policy on Housing Affordability.

> OUR NATIONAL HOUSING PLAN

The Greens recognise Australia is in the midst of a housing crisis across the entire spectrum. This initiative is just one part of the Greens 2016 National Housing Affordability Plan.

Related policies: Our plan to phase out Negative Gearing and the Capital Gains Discount, worth \$119.5 billion over ten years was announced in March 2016.

ⁱ The Specialist homelessness services 2014–15 at

www.aihw.gov.au/homelessness/specialist-homelessness-services-2014-15/

ⁱⁱ Australian Government AIHW Specialist homelessness services 2014–15 at <http://www.aihw.gov.au/homelessness/specialist-homelessness-services-2014-15/>

ⁱⁱⁱ ‘The Paddock People’ (2015), a documentary about a community of people sleeping rough in a carpark in Perth’s southern suburbs, at <https://vimeo.com/112479580>

^{iv} Australian Government AIHW Specialist homelessness services 2014–15 at <http://www.aihw.gov.au/homelessness/specialist-homelessness-services-2014-15/>

^v St Vincent de Paul (2016) ‘The Ache for Home – a plan to address chronic homelessness and housing unaffordability in Australia.

^{vi} The Specialist homelessness services 2014–15 web report

(<http://www.aihw.gov.au/homelessness/specialist-homelessness-services-2014-15/>)

^{vii} A comprehensive list is at Table DV.3. Clients who have experienced domestic and family violence, by need for services and assistance and service provision status, 2014–15, note figures used include times for when services were provided directly and do not include referrals. At

<http://www.aihw.gov.au/homelessness/specialist-homelessness-services-2014-15/domestic-violence/>

^{viii} AIHW (2012) *Specialist Homeless Services 2011–12* page 91 Figure 6.8:

Services with a high unmet need at the end of support (excluding accommodation) 2011–12. Figure shows between 15–25% of clients requiring these services are going without.

^{ix} Homelessness Australia (2016) ‘Homelessness Funding a quick guide’ Fact sheet at

http://www.homelessnessaustralia.org.au/images/publications/Fact_Sheets/Homelessness_funding_fact_sheet_UPDATED_Jan_2016.pdf

^x Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW) 2011. Government-funded specialist homelessness services: SAAP National Data Collection annual report 2010–11:

<http://www.aihw.gov.au/WorkArea/DownloadAsset.aspx?id=10737420818>