



Psychiatric Disability Services
of Victoria (MICSERV)

Pathways to Social Inclusion

Housing and Support:
a platform for recovery

July 2009 Supplement

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The evidence and research contained in VICSERV's *Pathways to Social Inclusion* papers was gathered during 2008. The final document was produced in August 2008. Since then there have been some significant developments in the Victorian and national social policy environments. This document provides an update in relation to housing and acts as a supplement to the *Pathways* paper *Housing and Support: a platform for recovery*.

December 2008

Release of the Federal Government's White Paper on Homelessness, *The Road Home. A national approach to reducing homelessness*.

One of the four main identified pathways into homelessness is '*untreated mental health and substance use disorders that lead to the loss of housing, education, employment, family and other relationships*.'

The Paper contains two headline goals:

- Halve overall homelessness by 2020
- Offer supported accommodation to all rough sleepers who need it by 2020

The response to homelessness will be implemented through three strategies:

- Turning off the tap: services will intervene early to prevent homelessness
- Improving and expanding services: services will be more connected and responsive to achieve sustainable housing, improve economic and social participation and end homelessness for their clients
- Breaking the cycle: people who become homeless will move quickly through the crisis system to stable housing with the support they need so that homelessness does not recur.

Under the Turning off the tap strategy, two initiatives are of particular relevance to people with mental illness. The most significant of these is 'no discharge into homelessness' policy. State and Territory authorities and services will be required to ensure that appropriate accommodation and support plans are put in place before a person is discharged from psychiatric care and a range of other settings. The policy aims to prevent homelessness and has objectives beyond the provision of housing. Post release services will also connect people to education, training and employment assistance and, where required, family counseling.

The second initiative—to assist people with a mental illness who are homeless or at risk of homelessness—is the expansion of the Personal Helpers and Mentors (PHaMs) program. PHaMs teams can work with people with a mental illness who are homeless to secure them accommodation and also to help stabilise housing where people are at risk of losing their homes due to debt, lack of living skills or difficult behaviour.

Funding of \$1.2 billion dollars has been allocated towards housing and support for the next four years. At this stage there is no detailed implementation plan attached to the strategy and it will remain up to the states and territories to accept and implement the strategies .

January 2009

The National Affordable Housing Agreement commenced on 1 January 2009. The NAHA is an agreement by the Council of Australian Governments initiating a whole-of-government approach in tackling the problem of housing affordability. The NAHA provides \$6.2 billion worth of housing assistance to low and middle income Australians in the first five years.

The NAHA is supported by the National Partnership Agreements on:

- Social housing
- Homelessness
- Indigenous Australians living in remote areas.

Under the National Partnership on Homelessness, the government promises new or expanded services to assist people with mental illness to maintain their housing and participate in the community.

These programs will have the following features:

- Combine accommodation, tenancy support and clinical care to support people in their homes
- Provide support that will enhance social and economic participation
- Link specialist mental health services with mainstream agencies and specialist homelessness services.

The National Partnership on Social Housing makes available \$200 million capital funding in both the 2008/2009 and 2009/2010 financial years.

February 2009

Under the Federal Government's Nation Building and Economic Stimulus Plan funding of \$6.4 billion has been provided over the next three and a half years for the construction of new social housing with a further \$400 million over two years for repairs and maintenance to existing public housing dwellings. Nationwide, it has been estimated that this will assist 20,000 households to access social and community housing. Victoria's share is \$1.6 billion. Some of this money will be used for maintenance to existing stock but the bulk will be used to construct 5,000 new properties. Three quarters of these new homes must be built by the end of 2010. Fifty per cent of the properties will be built by Housing Association. Preference will be given to one and two bedroom properties suitable for low income, one or two person households. So far the focus has been on building outcomes rather than social outcomes but it is believed that there will be some allocations specifically for people with a mental illness.

March 2009

The Victorian State Government's *Because Mental Health Matters – Victorian Mental Health Reform Strategy 2009-2019* was launched. It has a specific goal around housing: Goal 5.2 'Improve access to stable and affordable housing that is linked to flexible, scaled psychosocial rehabilitation support'.

Some of the proposed strategies include:

- An explicit consideration of the needs of people with mental illness as part of the planning and allocation of new and existing social housing
- A progressive restructure and extension of tailored packages of psychosocial rehabilitation linked to affordable housing options. The service model would include provision for planned out of hours/weekend support and flexible brokerage funding
- Consideration will also be given to planned growth in supported accommodation for people who require a highly structured environment, due to the profound and enduring nature of their psychiatric disability
- Mechanisms to create more affordable private rentals will be investigated
- In the short to medium term, strategies to link people with severe mental illness who live in supported residential units to clinical and psychosocial rehabilitation support (including in-reach support), primary health care and other social supports will be explored
- Targeted support for people who are homeless will also be increased and improved.

The 2008/2009 State Budget contained funding of \$15.6 million over four years for up to 50 new intensive psychosocial rehabilitation support packages, which will be attached to housing.

April 2009

Minister for Housing Richard Wynne announced that a new Victorian Homelessness Strategy will be developed. A feature of the new strategy will be that it will extend across the government and link efforts with other levels of government, the not for profit sector, businesses and the community.

May 2009

Minister Wynne hosted the first Round Table to discuss the development of the new homelessness strategy. The minutes of the Round Table can be accessed at:

<http://www.housing.vic.gov.au/homelessness-and-family-violence/homelessness/victorian-homelessness-strategy/round-table>

Recent Research

Following the Federal Government's White Paper, in March 2009 the Mental Health Council of Australia released its own strategy on mental health and housing - *Home Truths: mental health, housing and homelessness in Australia*. The document contains an extensive review of the relevant literature and research, it considers appropriate support and accommodation models, and identifies strategies and recommendations to provide as well as support housing for people experiencing mental illness. There are ten 'home truths' contained in the strategy. These truths are about what will happen if nothing is done about mental health and homelessness, and '*what governments must do if they are serious about addressing the national housing crisis.*'

The report can be accessed at: <http://www.mhca.org.au/>

Housing and associated support for people with mental illness or psychiatric disability was published by the University of New South Wales Social Policy and Research Centre in May 2009. The report examines how housing and housing support services can provide sustainable housing tenancies for people with mental illness or psychiatric disability in a manner that supports their recovery. The research was undertaken in the Queensland context, with four participating government agencies and the Office of the Public Advocate. It has three major components: a review of Australian and international literature; consumer and stakeholder consultations and evidence relating to cost-effectiveness and cost savings as a result of providing sustainable housing.

The report can be accessed at:

http://www.sprc.unsw.edu.au/reports/2009/Old_Housing_mental%20health.pdf

A paper presented at the July 2009 Social Policy Conference—*Are the homeless mentally ill?*—disputes the commonly held belief that most homeless people have a mental illness. The study of a large sample of homeless people's histories also found that homelessness is not often directly caused by mental illness, but is usually precipitated by family breakdown. This is especially true for young people. The thirty one per cent of homeless people with a mental illness were generally among the long-term homeless.

The report makes two policy recommendations:

1. To increase support for families caring for a young person with a mental illness.
2. To give priority to people's housing needs, before addressing their mental health issues. This is known as the 'housing first' or 'supportive housing' approach.

The paper can be accessed at: <http://www.sprc.unsw.edu.au/ASPC2009/papers/Paper375.pdf>