



Council to Homeless Persons

**Homelessness assistance and
the 2006 Commonwealth
Games**

**A strategy to ensure continuity of
services to people who are
homeless in metropolitan
Melbourne**

July 2005

This report contains 15 pages

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1 Introduction

The Commonwealth Games will take place in Melbourne in March 2006. Experience of such major events, both in Australia and overseas, suggests there can be impacts on both the delivery of services for people who are homeless and changes in the way the broader community responds to people who are homeless. Planning is critical to ensure continuity of a range of community services, including homelessness assistance.

The Office of Housing has initiated a number of consultative processes, in metropolitan Melbourne and regional Victoria, with homelessness assistance services and other relevant stakeholders, to develop a strategy to ensure the continuity of homelessness assistance services in Victoria.

The Office of Housing provided funding to the Council to Homeless Persons to assist them with the consultative process in metropolitan Melbourne. KPMG was engaged by the Council to Homeless Persons (CHP) in June 2005 to facilitate a forum of key stakeholders and draft a strategic action plan based on this stakeholder input..

1.1 Process for developing the strategy

On 9 June 2005, the Minister for Sport and Recreation and Minister for the Commonwealth Games, the Hon Justin Madden, officially opened the Melbourne forum on homelessness assistance and the Commonwealth Games. He provided an overview of Commonwealth Games activities and answered questions.

Peter Lake, Manager of Homelessness Assistance Programs, Office of Housing, provided information to the forum about other regional consultative processes and a summary of a report regarding homelessness assistance and the Sydney Olympics.

The stakeholders present included representatives of homelessness service providers, advocates, consumers of homelessness services, the Office of Housing (OoH) in the Department of Human Services and the Office of the Commonwealth Games (OCG). The workshop identified potential issues for the homeless posed by the forthcoming Commonwealth Games and provided input on a range of possible actions in response. The key issues identified are presented in section 2 of this report.

Stakeholder views on appropriate mechanisms to enable continuity of services to people who are homeless in metropolitan Melbourne, throughout the Commonwealth Games, have been used as a basis for the strategic approach presented in section 3 of this report. KPMG has considered this input and built on and adapted it as necessary to provide a strategic response, which is practical and can be implemented in the time frame available. A record of all proposed actions suggested by workshop participants is included at Appendix A.

Potential opportunities that the Games offer people who are homeless are suggested in section 4. This is not an in-depth analysis, as this area was not the main focus of the workshop.

A recommended mechanism for taking the strategy forward is proposed in section 5.

1.2 Scope of the strategy

The focus of the workshop was on issues for and responses to homelessness assistance in metropolitan Melbourne during the Commonwealth Games. However issues identified may also apply to other major events in Melbourne. The strategies identified can therefore have application beyond the Commonwealth Games, to events that attract large numbers of spectators and visitors to Melbourne.

Strategies arising from this report largely focus on metropolitan Melbourne. Through the Office of Housing consultative processes, regional areas will develop their own strategies. However, some of the recommended actions in this report will relate to the continuity of homelessness assistance services in regional areas.

1.3 Background

The Commonwealth Games will take place in Melbourne from 15 to 26 March 2006. Events will be held in regional Victoria as well as metropolitan Melbourne. Over one million spectators are anticipated, including 40,000 overseas and 50,000 interstate visitors. In addition to the sports program there will be range of cultural events.

The Games will draw on a volunteer workforce estimated at 15,000.

The Minister for Sport and Recreation and Minister for the Commonwealth Games, in opening the workshop, advised that strategies to ensure inclusion included volunteer training for those in disadvantaged groups as well as free events and entertainment.

It was also noted during the workshop that Police would not be taking leave, meaning a much larger than usual policing contingent during the games.

2 Key issues Melbourne will face in providing homelessness assistance in the Commonwealth games period.

The workshop identified four broad categories of issues that could potentially affect homelessness assistance during the Commonwealth Games. These are:

- Availability of accommodation for people who are homeless;
- Continuity of homelessness services during the Games;
- Response to people who are homeless in public places; and
- Communication, especially to services and consumers, about impacts of the Commonwealth Games.

2.1 Availability of accommodation for people who are homeless

The Commonwealth Games could cause reduced access to hotels and motels currently used as short-term emergency accommodation. In relation to securing this form of short-term emergency accommodation, pre-booking with advance payments has been a strategy used elsewhere. Some stakeholders noted that it is difficult to pre-purchase this kind of accommodation in peak times. Barriers are either price or providers not wishing to deal with homelessness services.

If accommodation is able to be pre-booked, it should not be assumed that those to be accommodated would be singles. Further, the duration of stay allowed, needed to be realistic as the usual lead time required to arrange private rental may be further increased by the Commonwealth Games activity.

A further potential issue is displacement of residents of low cost housing (such as rooming houses) prior to the Games in order for this accommodation to be offered to the more lucrative tourist market.

2.2 Continuity of homelessness services

Stakeholders stressed it was important the Government be aware of the importance of ensuring that homelessness assistance continued undisrupted during the Commonwealth Games and of the essential nature of the services provided.

Disruption that could occur during the Games, may affect access to homelessness services, especially in areas, which are close to sites for sporting and cultural events.

The example of mobile services such as soup vans was used to illustrate how Games activity could disrupt normal service arrangements, especially where street closures and large crowds were involved. However, as well as possible issues for mobile services, there are potentially

problems that people who are homeless may experience in accessing fixed services located in or near Games activities.

2.3 Response to people who are homeless in public places

Stakeholders expressed concern about the possibility of poor treatment of people who are homeless in public places, arising from a desire to hide homelessness at a time when the city was being showcased. This could include such practices as people who are homeless and beggars being asked to “move on” by police or treated disrespectfully in other ways.

An allied issue was the possibility of reduced tolerance for behaviour that was deemed to be anti-social. Such behaviour could be exhibited by those with mental health issues and be misinterpreted even where there was no real risk to other community members.

Stakeholders voiced the view that the need for a protocol around how people who are homeless were treated in public places was an ongoing issue and not just a concern at the time of the Commonwealth Games.

Stakeholders expressed concern that the entire metropolitan based police force will be on duty over the games period, which could lead to “over-policing”, potentially increasing the practice of moving people who are homeless on. However, the police numbers were also seen as providing an opportunity to promote a new protocol widely, and change policing behaviour where this is required.

The City of Melbourne already has a protocol for working with police over these issues.

Stakeholders also noted that many of the large volunteer workforce to be involved in the Games, might not understand homelessness issues or be tolerant of people who are homeless in public places.

2.4 Communication

It was seen that there was potential for problems in services, consumers and other stakeholders receiving clear communication about the impacts of the Commonwealth Games on service operation and about changed operational arrangements. Clear communication is needed to reach and link:

- State Government;
- Local Government;
- Homeless services;
- Other community services that assist people who are homeless;
- Police and emergency services; and
- People who are homeless.

3 A strategic response to ensure continuity of services to people who are homeless in metropolitan Melbourne

In the workshop, stakeholders were asked to contribute actions to address the four overarching issues identified. A full list of suggested actions is provided at appendix A. Criteria have been applied in determining which actions should form part of a strategic response. These parameters are essentially pragmatic and preclude action which:

- requires a major shift in government policy;
- requires changes to legislation or regulation that are not possible given the time frame available; or
- are unlikely to elicit the necessary support of relevant departments and stakeholders.

Further stakeholder ideas have been developed for inclusion in the strategic plan where this has been necessary in order to provide clarity but in making any amendments has not altered the intention of the stakeholder contribution.

The following strategic action plan provides clear directions in response to the four issues identified, along with details of stakeholders responsible (including who has lead responsibility) and proposed timeframes. In determining timeframes, the Christmas period has been taken into account so that action, in general, is not proposed to occur over the December and January period.

A strategic response to ensure continuity of homeless assistance during the Commonwealth Games

Area 1 – Securing and maintaining emergency and low cost housing		
Actions Required	Responsibility	Timelines
1.1 Ensure existing tenants in low cost accommodation, including rooming houses, are aware of their rights and responsibilities by: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • developing information materials and distributing these through homelessness services and associated networks; and • ensuring a tenancy information hotline is available , including an after hours response, to provide information to tenants who may be affected by the Games. 	OoH, Consumer Affairs Victoria (CAV), OCG OoH, CAV and OCG reach agreement on how to proceed.	Immediate start to ensure preparations completed by November 2005
1.2 Ensure operators of low cost accommodation, including rooming houses, are aware of their responsibilities throughout the Games period by preparing and distributing information material through local government.	As above, and including relevant local government authorities for distribution	As above
1.3 Monitor issues raised by callers to the hotline in order to use this information in the planning for future major events.	OoH and OCG	For the duration of the hotline service
1.4 Pre-purchase of hotel and motel accommodation to be offered as emergency accommodation for the period in the immediate lead up to, during and following the Games, based on: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • data on current and estimated usage provided by homelessness services; • data provided by OCG on estimated numbers of visitors to the Games and any estimates available about visitors’ accommodation choices; and • data provided by the OCG on the areas most affected by Games 	OoH as lead; homelessness services	August to September 2005

Area 1 – Securing and maintaining emergency and low cost housing		
Actions Required	Responsibility	Timelines
activity		
1.5 Ensure guidelines regarding the use of Housing Establishment Fund (HEF) are adhered to.	OoH as lead; homelessness services	By November 2005

Area 2 – Ensuring service continuity		
Actions Required	Responsibility	Timelines
2.1 Communication to homelessness agencies in the lead up to the Games about likely impacts of the event on service continuity	OCG, OoH	November 2005 and January to February 2006
2.2 Provide information to agencies about logistical arrangements for the Games, including event location scheduling, estimated numbers of spectators, road barriers, altered transport arrangements and so on.	OCG lead; OoH	January-February 2006
2.3 Develop and distribute information, for consumers and services, including relevant after hours service responses and providing details of assistance available.	OoH lead, CHP	Preparation in September to November 2005 in order to have a service ready to function by early February 2006

Area 3 – Public space management		
Actions Required	Responsibility	Timelines
3.1 Develop a protocol, in conjunction with Victoria police: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • to guide the way in which police respond to people who are homeless in public places; and • enables an improved understanding by police of the situation of people who are homeless and ensures that people who are homeless are treated with respect and dignity.¹. 	OoH as lead; DOJ including Victoria Police; local government; OCG, CHP; homeless services and consumers.	Immediate start to ensure preparations completed by February 2006.
3.2 As part of overall training arranged by the OCG, provide training and information for volunteers in relation to homelessness including issues for Indigenous people who are homeless and young people who are homeless.	OCG as lead, OoH ; and CHP.	Commencement of planning in August 2005 to ensure training completed by February 2006.

¹ The protocol to be informed by existing agreements of this nature that have proven effective and build on existing local government structures as appropriate.

Area 4 – Communication		
Actions Required	Responsibility	Timelines
Refer to actions 1.1 and 1.2		
4.1 Ensure appropriate information is posted on OCG, OOH, CHP, CAV and DOJ websites. The information will include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • general information about the Games and what impacts can be expected; and • updates on plans which may impact on service delivery (such as road closures and transport service changes). 	OoH ; OCG, CHP, DOJ, CAV, local government	Established between October and November 2005 and kept up to date thereafter until the completion of the Games.
4.2 Ensure that issues regarding homelessness and policing are communicated, discussed and resolved through regular meetings at a local level.	DHS regions, local government supported by OOH, CHP and DOJ	From October until the completion of the Commonwealth Games
4.3 Prepare and distribute relevant material detailing strategic actions put in place to ensure continuity of homelessness assistance, through appropriate channels which can be used to obtain further information.	OoH to coordinate; OCG; CHP; , DOJ, DHS regions	Preparation of material in October and November 2005 and distribution from November 2005 until the completion of the Commonwealth Games in late March 2006.

4 Opportunities the Games present for people who are homeless

As well as presenting issues for service delivery, the Commonwealth Games can also provide positive opportunities for people who are homeless.

These include:

- opportunities to participate as spectators in free sporting and cultural events;
- opportunities for people who are homeless to find employment in Games related roles;
- the chance to train as a volunteer as part of the training program targeted at 1500 people in disadvantaged situations;
- greater connection with local communities through local community events; and
- flow on effects from the inclusivity theme which underpins the Games

Although important, these opportunities have not been included in the strategic response developed by KPMG which has focussed on the need to avoid negative impacts for people who are homeless. There needs to be further consideration by advocacy bodies about the way in which potential opportunities that the Games offer people who are homeless can be realised.

5 Taking the response forward

The actions outlined in section 3 of this paper provide directions for a strategic response to the issues identified. In most actions there is no one stakeholder responsible but joint action is required. It is therefore suggested that the next step in progressing actions, once these are ratified, may be the development of a working group designed to bring all relevant stakeholders together.

The working group should include representatives from:

- OoH (as convenor);
- OCG;
- relevant local government authorities;
- CHP; and
- homelessness services.

The working group should also be informed by the views of consumers. It is suggested that this input may be facilitated by CHP.

As the time lines for enacting a strategic response are tight, and must take into account the Christmas period, it is imperative the working group be convened as soon as possible. The OoH, which has the main responsibility for most action items, will need to commence planning work immediately the strategic response is endorsed.

OOH and CHP will need to work together to coordinate further consultative and representative processes.

A Feedback from the workshop on possible actions and strategies

The following record of feedback from workshop participants is organised around the four key issues identified.

Issue: Availability of accommodation for people who are homeless

Ideas contributed included:

- Ensuring residents and landlords of low cost accommodation, including rooming houses, are aware of their rights and responsibilities.
- Using information distribution and use of the media to ensure there is a clear understanding of tenants' rights and responsibilities.
- Enlisting local government to communicate with landlords about rights and responsibilities.
- Using the OCG Business Ready strategy as a vehicle to raise the issue of homelessness with retailers and landlords.
- Capping hotel and motel rates, as well as rents in rooming houses, caravan parks and other forms of private rental, through legislation.
- Providing a strong advocacy function to prevent evictions from low cost housing.
- Pre-booking hotels and motels to be used as emergency accommodation.
- Ensuring that an adequate proportion of pre-booked accommodation to be used as emergency accommodation is suitable for families.
- Linking those in hotels and motels used as emergency accommodation to the broader homelessness system.
- Developing realistic length of stay rules applying to hotels and motels to be used as emergency accommodation.
- Using vacant OoH stock as emergency accommodation.
- Establishing a working group to address the issue of reduced low cost accommodation.

Issue: Continuity of homeless services during the Games

Ideas contributed included:

- OoH communicating to homelessness services in the lead up to the Games so that they can anticipate impacts and make arrangements as necessary, including staff leave arrangements during the Games period.
- Using existing strategies that agencies apply to manage demand in peak periods.
- Providing information to services about the impacts of the Games in practical terms, including such matters as road closures and barriers, changed transport arrangements and so on.
- Making the information that services need about the Games available after hours and in the lead up to and following the actual Games period.
- Providing additional material aid.
- Providing free sleeping areas.
- Providing information for consumers based on their preferences about how they wish to be kept informed.

Issue: Response to people who are homeless in public places

Ideas contributed included:

- Using a model such as the Vancouver Inclusivity Agreement developed for the 2010 Winter Olympic Games.
- Building on the agreement that the City of Melbourne has with police and on local government structures already in place.
- Developing a protocol with police to cover the Commonwealth Games, but which would also be ongoing. This would be developed in conjunction with OoH, CHP, practitioners, consumers and local government. The protocol would be responsive to issues in relation to youth and Indigenous homelessness as well as broader homelessness issues.
- Engaging public housing tenants, local government and residents groups to have input into a public places protocol.
- Using a website to keep stakeholders informed about the protocol.

- Developing a definition of “anti social behaviour” so that it is clear what behaviour is and is not acceptable and what is or is not lawful.
- Educating volunteers about homelessness including Indigenous and youth specific issues. This could be undertaken by practitioners and take place in the context of the training to be organised for volunteers by OCG.

Issue: Communication

Ideas contributed included:

- Creating an information service with a 1800 number to provide information to government, local government, police, accommodation providers, homelessness services and people who are homeless.
- Convening weekly meeting between OoH, OCG, local government and police and emergency services to ensure co-ordination of activity and information flow.
- Developing printed information for police about arrangements that will affect people who are homeless during the Games.
- Ensuring information is also distributed to the North West and Southern regions of DHS.
- Using flyers as a further means to provide information to service users.
- Ensuring there are messages to people who are homeless to encourage their participation in, and enjoyment of, the Games.
- Developing a website, managed by CHP, to provide information about the Games and homelessness assistance.
- Establishing a consumer team with responsibility to disseminate information to other consumers.

Other actions suggested

- Preventing rises in food costs during the Games.
- Providing Games tickets to people who are homeless to ensure their inclusion in the event.
- As a longer-term option, developing an affordable housing strategy which would ease the problem of homelessness.

B Abbreviations

CHP – Council to Homeless Persons

OCG- Office of the Commonwealth Games

OoH – Office of Housing, Department of Human Services