

# National Partnership Agreement

## Responses for young people experiencing homelessness in Victoria.

### Youth Homelessness in Victoria

Young people aged 15–25 years who are homeless or at risk of homelessness make up the largest group assisted by the homelessness service sector in Victoria. These young people are made up of a diverse cross-section of our community and face severe structural and personal disadvantage, such as poverty, poor access to health care, absence of a home environment and connection to community, little participation in education, and marginal employment prospects.

With timely and appropriate support and accommodation, young people experiencing homelessness can avoid the possibility of ongoing cycles of economic and social disadvantage, and successfully transition to adulthood as secure and confident members of the community.

### Work already underway

Since 1999, the Victorian Government has placed significant investment into expanding and diversifying services that both reduce homelessness and improve the way services engage with clients who are homeless, at risk of homelessness, or escaping family and domestic violence.

Recognising that homelessness is a complex issue, in Victoria our responses reflect and address the needs and circumstances of each individual, rather than having a 'one size fits all' approach to service delivery. Victoria has worked hard to achieve joined-up responses across Government and in the service system so that individual needs can be holistically addressed.

Through the *Creating Connections* Youth Homelessness Action Plan, responses to young homeless people in Victoria are now tailored around the different ages and stages in a young person's development, and are underpinned by the notion of interdependence.

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*Creating Connections* has provided funding for youth transitions hubs in each region. These new services provide a broader range of support to young people and each youth transitions hub offers the following services:

- Life skills program
- Support to young people to access employment, education and training opportunities
- Family reconciliation services
- Intensive case management and intensive support for young people with high and complex needs
- Support to link young people into private rented housing and other long term housing options.

### The Road Home

In December 2008, the Australian Government released a *White Paper on Homelessness, The Road Home*, which called on all levels of government, business, the not for profit sector and the community to join together to reduce homelessness.

*The Road Home* outlined the need for new investment in homelessness and reform of existing services.

In *The Road Home*, the Australian Government adopted two headline goals to:

- halve overall homelessness by 2020;
- offer supported accommodation to all rough sleepers who need it by 2020.

The White Paper also included interim targets to 2013 to contribute to these long term goals.

### The National Partnership Agreement

In November 2008, the Council of Australian Governments established a National Partnership Agreement (NPA) on Homelessness.

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Under the Agreement the Australian Government has agreed to provide additional funding to the States and Territories to reduce homelessness. States and Territories have agreed to match the Australian Government funding to deliver services and capital projects that will contribute to an overall reduction in homelessness.

### Youth Specific NPA Initiatives

The Victorian Government's Implementation Plan for the National Partnership Agreement on Homelessness (NP) has a focus on prevention, early intervention and building a foundation to reform and diversify the response to homelessness in Victoria.

The NP initiatives are part of an overall approach to reducing homelessness and are part of solutions and practice approaches that are focussed on the long term. These youth specific initiatives will act as a platform on which the new strategy for homeless Victorians will build services for young people.

### \$13.75 million over four years to strengthen youth crisis responses

*Creating Connections* commits to strengthening youth refuge services. In 2008, Housing & Community Building (H&CB) worked with youth refuge providers to agree on service system reform approach that will give youth refuges a new and enhanced role in improving outcomes for young people who are homeless.

These service reforms will support a whole of Government response to homeless young people and will allow youth refuges to work more effectively in the prevention of young peoples 'at risk', of transitioning from youth homelessness to adult homelessness. Additionally, these reforms will allow for greater support of young people with complex needs and challenging behaviour.

The new funding will augment existing funding to youth refuges in two phases:

Through phase 1, all refuges will receive an increase to their funding base. This funding will support the effective running of crisis facilities and will provide youth refuges with brokerage funds to enhance homelessness support responses.

In phase 2, H&CB will resource a new model of service delivery for eight youth refuges in Victoria.

This response will be available across each region to improve outcomes for young people who are homeless as follows:

Young people who are homeless will be supported and guided by specialist support teams to address their psychological wellbeing, health and social needs. Young people will receive a structured and holistic support package that draws on practice in other service systems and responds to the crisis and trauma associated with homelessness. These responses are usually described as therapeutic responses.

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- Young people who are homeless or at risk of homelessness will be supported to reconcile with their families and return home where it is safe to do so.
- When young people leave a youth refuge they will receive follow up support that assists them to make connections in their local community and to make a successful transition to more independent living.
- Young people who are sleeping rough or who have nowhere safe to live will receive an assessment of their needs and a place at a youth refuge as part of a longer term approach to addressing their housing and support needs.

The new funding will be phased in across Victoria over the next three years, with phase 1 funding commencing in 2009-10.

DHS Regions will lead the allocation of funding in each Region.

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### **\$3.5 million over four years for dual diagnosis workers**

*Creating Connections* commits to increasing the effectiveness of the youth homelessness response to young people with complex needs.

Within the youth homelessness population there are a growing number of young people who have particular, significant and complex needs that can only be met through a well planned and coordinated multi disciplined response.

Research from Project *i* indicates that 73 percent of young people surveyed reported issues with alcohol or other drugs, 26 percent reported mental illness and of those young people, 22 percent experienced both alcohol or drug and mental health issues. It is recognised that these two occurring issues have a significant impact on the ability of young people to access and maintain accommodation and support within the current youth homelessness service system.

In 2009-10 H&CB will establish a dedicated Youth Homelessness Dual Diagnosis response embedded within the Youth Homelessness Service system of each Region.

These dedicated roles will work in partnership with the youth homelessness sector to provide:

- Specialist case management support
- Better managed responses to episodes of substance and/or mental health related crisis
- Better coordinated access and responses between homelessness and clinical mental health and/or alcohol and drug services
- Support and enhance sector capacity in responding & managing complex issues within the youth homelessness service sector

### **\$3.3 million over four years to establish “foyer like” models of housing and support**

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Research commissioned by H&CB into young people's engagement with education, employment and training opportunities (EET) recommends a shift to a broader approach to case management for young people that considers their self esteem, social connections and economic resources as well as their housing outcomes. Engagement with EET contributes to outcomes in each of these domains.

H&CB will establish a new model of housing and support for young people in regional Victoria, with a focus on engaging young people in EET opportunities. The model will support 90 young people by integrating together:

- Safe, secure and affordable accommodation
- Personal support services, including mentoring
- Reconnection to learning and skills development
- Work experience and access to jobs that are sustainable.

The new model of housing and support will contribute to achieving the White Paper outcomes in terms of reducing repeat homelessness for young people. In addition, it will provide structured programs that create positive experiences of EET for young people who are homeless.

This response requires a whole of Government response and involvement from agencies and organisations outside the homelessness sector.

In 2009-10 H&CB will work with a range of Government departments and external organisations to establish the key components of such a model and to ensure that it reflects the learnings from similar models already in place in Victoria – *Step Ahead, Support for Young People that Really Counts* and *Ladder*.

A number of locations in regional Victoria are being considered for the new model and H&CB is working with local stakeholders to identify suitable sites for capital development. It is expected that new facilities will be completed

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in 2011-12, dependent on site availability and construction timelines.

### **\$3 million for family reconciliation services for young people**

Young people who are newly homeless or at risk of homelessness require early intervention responses to prevent them from entering the homelessness service system and to keep them connected to family and community.

In recent years the homelessness service system in Victoria has had an increased focus on providing family reconciliation and mediation interventions to young people.

H&CB will establish a project that will further expand the homelessness service system's capacity to deliver family reconciliation and mediation services. This project will focus on disadvantaged geographical areas where responses are limited or do not currently exist.

In 2009-10 H&CB will work with a range of Government departments and service providers to establish the new project to ensure that it aligns with existing responses such as the Family Reconciliation and Mediation Program, the SAAP funded family reconciliation positions and the Australian Government funded Reconnect program.

### **\$3 million for responses to young people leaving care**

In Victoria each year between 400-600 young people aged 16-18 leave statutory care, a proportion of these young people are at risk of homelessness.

H&CB through *Creating Connections* have allocated funding to a series of projects for

young people leaving the care of the state, with a specific focus on housing and support.

This was in response to the numbers of young people entering the homelessness service system (who had a history or experience in the care system) and who had limited capacity to live independently.

In addition, Children Youth & Families (CY&F), DHS has established a number of new programs to assist young people in their transition from care.

H&CB will identify ways in which its existing response can be enhanced in each region, including specific responses to Indigenous young people.

Guidelines will be developed to support homelessness providers to deliver a consistent approach to assessment, referral and case management that incorporates existing good practice as well as building in any new approaches.

In 2009-10 H&CB will work with CY&F and selected service providers to establish any new or enhanced programs.

## **Victorian Strategic Framework**

The Victorian Government has now commenced work on the development of a new Victorian Homelessness Strategy.

The new strategy will establish the strategic directions for achieving reform of the homelessness sector and mainstream service systems over the next ten years. The development of a new homelessness strategy builds on the National Partnership Agreement on Homelessness to bring Victoria's response where it needs to be by 2020.

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### Strengthening youth crisis responses

#### Background

*Creating Connections* commits to strengthening youth refuge services. In 2008, H&CB worked with youth refuge providers to agree a service system reform approach that will give youth refuges a new and enhanced role in improving outcomes for young people who are homeless.

#### National Partnership Agreement Funding

As a result of this work, the Australian and Victorian Governments have allocated an additional \$13.75 million over four years, through the National Partnership Agreement on Homelessness (NPA), to strengthen youth crisis responses across the state. The new funding will be phased in over the four years of the NPA (2009-2013).

The new funding will support youth refuges to work more effectively in the prevention of young peoples 'at risk', of transitioning from youth homelessness to adult homelessness. Additionally, these reforms will allow for greater support of young people with complex needs and challenging behaviour.

This new approach is also in line with our aim of enhancing the youth refuge system response in the provision of early intervention responses and in diverting young people from the homelessness service system where appropriate. The new funding is attached to the delivery of the outcomes set out in the NPA:

- Fewer people will become homeless and fewer of those will sleep rough
- Fewer people will become homeless more than once
- People at risk of or experiencing homelessness will maintain or improve connections with their families and communities, and maintain or improve their education, training or employment participation
- People at risk of or experiencing homelessness will be supported by quality services with improved access to sustainable housing.

#### Distribution of new funding to youth refuges in Victoria

The new funding will build on the existing funding to youth refuges and will be distributed in two phases:

Through phase 1, all refuges will receive additional funding. This funding will support the running of crisis facilities and will provide youth refuges with brokerage funds to enhance homelessness support responses.

H&CB will develop guidelines and minimum service deliver benchmarks attached to the phase 1 funding. Youth refuges will receive the first payment in December 2009, with funding increasing to the full amount in 2012-13.

In phase 2, H&CB will resource a new model of service delivery for eight youth refuges in Victoria. This response will be available across each region to improve outcomes for young people who are homeless as follows:

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- Young people who are homeless will be supported and guided by specialist support teams to address their psychological, emotional, health and social needs. Young people will receive a structured and holistic support package that draws on practice in other service systems and addresses the crisis and trauma of becoming homeless.
- When young people leave a youth refuge they will receive follow up support that assists them to make connections in their local community and to make a successful transition to more independent living.
- Young people who are sleeping rough or who have nowhere safe to live will receive an assessment of their needs and a place at a youth refuge as part of a longer term approach to addressing their housing and support needs.
- Young people who are homeless or at risk of homelessness will be supported to reconcile with their families and return home where it is safe to do so.

The phase 2 funding will allow eight youth refuges in Victoria to employ additional case management staff and a specialist role focusing on early intervention, family reconciliation and young people's wellbeing.

### Specialist's Role

In strengthening the youth refuge service system to respond more comprehensively to young people's developmental, psychological, health and social needs we are introducing the role of specialist practitioners.

Young people consistently report family conflict as a primary reason for their homelessness. Common causes of conflict with parents include many of the issues associated with the transition from adolescence to adulthood.

Additionally, young people experiencing homelessness commonly report neglect, physical, emotional and sexual abuse. These experiences tend to be over a period of time rather than a one off episode before the young person leaves home. It is also recognised that young people are vulnerable to these experiences and resulting impacts in their experiences of homelessness.

In supporting young people's potential to avoid and move beyond homelessness the objectives of the specialist response will include:

- **Prevention**- working with young people at risk of homelessness e.g. family conflict
- **Early intervention and diversion**- e.g. Working with young people and their families in brokering a safe and appropriate return to home
- **Short term interventions**: Promoting wellbeing, cultivating strategies and relieving immediate distress and trauma associated with homelessness e.g. depression, anxiety
- **Medium term interventions**: in response to issues from trauma & abuse to emergent mental health issues.
- **Psychosocial assessment**- in support of living skill development needs
- **Behavioural support & strategies**

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- **Pathways & referring on:** young people requiring longer-term counselling or clinical responses

These responses draw on practice in other service systems, and are usually described as therapeutic responses.

The funding will be phased over the four years of the NPA, with the first enhanced models being delivered from March 2010. DHS Regions will lead the process of allocating the phase 2 funding in each Region and will invite submissions from youth refuge providers to deliver the new responses across the Region.

The exact allocation of phase 2 resources is still being discussed with DHS Regions and is linked to a number of new capital developments. It is expected that the youth refuge funding will be distributed as follows:

### **2009-10**

Partial phase 1 funding to all existing youth refuges distributed in December variation  
2 enhanced responses in Southern region and Eastern Region from March 2010

### **2010-11**

Continue partial phase 1 funding for full year  
Continue 2 enhanced responses in Southern Region and Eastern Region for full year

### **2011-12**

Continue partial phase 1 funding for full year  
Continue 2 enhanced responses in Southern Region and Eastern Region for full year  
1 additional enhanced response in North & West Region or Gippsland'

### **2012-13**

Full phase 1 funding to all existing youth refuges  
Continue 3 enhanced responses in Southern, Eastern and North & West or Gippsland Regions  
Implement enhanced responses in remaining regions – Hume, Barwon South West and North & West or Gippsland  
Additional enhanced response in North & West Region  
New youth crisis responses in Grampians and Loddon Mallee Regions

This timetable and the allocation of funding to each DHS Region is subject to change depending on discussions with DHS Regions and progress on new capital developments.

### **Targets and reporting requirements**

H&CB will agree the details of the enhanced response in each Region, based on the submissions processes in each Region, with youth refuge providers. H&CB will also agree additional targets and reporting requirements with youth refuge providers, with an emphasis on measuring outcomes as well as outputs. Quarterly reports will be requested from all youth refuges from 2009-10 onwards.

### **Next steps**

H&CB is developing the guidelines and minimum standards attached to the phase 1 funding and will discuss these with youth refuge providers at a statewide meeting in October 2009. Local information sessions will be held in those Regions where enhanced responses will be implemented in

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2009-10, organised by DHS Regions. All DHS Regions will provide regular information updates to youth refuge providers as the reforms are implemented across the state.