



Australian Government

Australian Government response to the
House of Representatives Standing Committee on Social Policy and
Legal Affairs report:

Inquiry into homelessness in Australia final report

FEBRUARY 2022

Introduction

The House of Representatives Standing Committee on Social Policy and Legal Affairs (the Committee) released its final report of the Inquiry into Homelessness in Australia (the Inquiry) on 4 August 2021.

The Australian Government welcomes the final report and thanks the Committee for its work. The Government also acknowledges the interim report, *Shelter in the storm – COVID-19 and homelessness*.

Committee Proceedings

The Committee resolved to conduct an inquiry into homelessness in Australia on 11 February 2020, following a referral from the Minister for Families and Social Services, Senator the Hon Anne Ruston, and the former Assistant Minister for Community Housing, Homelessness and Community Services, the Hon Luke Howarth MP.

The Committee received and published 201 submissions from a range of organisations. The Department of Social Services (DSS) provided a multi-agency submission.

The Committee also held 5 public hearings. DSS gave evidence at the 7 July 2020 public hearing.

The Committee published its interim report on 7 October 2020 and its final report on 4 August 2021.

Committee Recommendations

The final report makes 35 recommendations and there were no recommendations in the interim report.

The Government is committed to supporting all Australians, including those experiencing or at risk of homelessness, as the nation emerges from the coronavirus pandemic and reopens the economy.

While state and territory governments (states) are primarily responsible for delivering housing and homelessness services, in 2021-22 the Australian Government expects to spend around \$9.3 billion to help improve housing and homelessness outcomes. This includes an expected \$5.3 billion in Commonwealth Rent Assistance to help eligible Australians on welfare payments pay their rent and around \$1.6 billion through the National Housing and Homelessness Agreement (NHHA) to states.

The NHHA commits funding each year to states to contribute to improving access to affordable, safe and sustainable housing, including to prevent and address homelessness, and to support social and economic participation.

Through the NHHA, the Australian Government will provide around \$131.8 million for homelessness services in 2021-22, which must be matched by the states. Under the NHHA, states are responsible for determining priorities and the type and locations of services funded.

The NHHA requires states to have publicly available housing and homelessness strategies and contribute to improved data collection and reporting. The housing priority policy areas to be addressed under the NHHA include affordable housing, social housing, encouraging growth and supporting the viability of the community housing sector, tenancy reform, home ownership and planning and zoning reform initiatives.

Homelessness strategies in each jurisdiction must address a range of priority cohorts listed in the NHHA, and outline reforms or initiatives which contribute to a reduction in the incidence of homelessness.

The NHHA priority homelessness cohorts are older people, women and children affected by family and domestic violence, children and young people, Indigenous Australians, people experiencing repeat homelessness, and people exiting institutions and care into homelessness.

Australian Government response to the final report

Recommendations made by the Committee

- 1. The Committee recommends that the Australian Bureau of Statistics commission an independent review of the statistical definition of homelessness and its operation, having particular regard to the circumstances in which persons living in severely crowded dwellings and boarding houses should be categorised as homeless. The review should consider:**
- national and international best practice;**
 - the need for greater inclusion of non-western and Indigenous Australian cultural practices and perspectives; and**
 - in relation to overcrowding, the need for the use of other measures in addition to or in place of the Canadian National Occupancy Standard.**

Supported in principle.

The Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) works with other stakeholders to define and measure homelessness.

The ABS supports a review of the definition of homelessness in light of new research. The ABS proposes to use the Homelessness Statistics Reference Group and other stakeholders to undertake this review.

The ABS is a member of Housing and Homelessness Data Working Group, jointly established by the Commonwealth and states to progress the Data Improvement Plan under the National Housing and Homelessness Agreement. As part of this group, the ABS is working on data improvements including examining alternate measures for overcrowding. The ABS will review findings from the recently commissioned Australian Housing and Urban Research Institute research on methods to assess measures of crowding within Indigenous settings when released. It has used case studies in Alice Springs, APY Lands, Adelaide and Sydney to support this work.

- 2. The Committee recommends that the Australian Government commission an independent review of the Australian Bureau of Statistics' collection and use of Census of Population and Housing data to estimate the homeless population, having particular regard to the problem of overcounting and undercounting particular categories of homeless persons and demographic groups.**

The review should involve stakeholder consultation and should be completed in time to inform the conduct of the 2026 Census.

Supported in principle.

The Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) will review the use of the Census for measuring homelessness through a review of the outcomes of the 2021 Census. The ABS will consult with the Homelessness Statistics Reference group and other stakeholders. This review will include recommendations for any potential changes ahead of the 2026 Census.

3. The Committee recommends that the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare implement changes to the Specialist Homelessness Services Collection to ensure that data collected:

- **more comprehensively captures unmet need for services and casual contacts with service providers;**
- **more clearly identifies clients' reasons for seeking assistance;**
- **provides for spatial analysis of demand for services;**
- **can be disaggregated by age and sex to support the development of targeted policies and responses; and**
- **is more inclusive of diverse groups and needs.**

Supported in principle.

Changes to the Specialist Homelessness Services Collection are agreed and prioritised through negotiations between the Australian Government and states, as described in the National Housing and Homelessness Agreement (NHHA) Schedule E, Data Improvement Plan (DIP). Negotiations on the next iteration of the DIP are due to commence in June 2022 in accordance with the NHHA.

4. The Committee recommends that the Australian Government provide funding to the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare to establish a national longitudinal housing and homelessness data set.

The Australian Government should also give consideration to providing funding for research projects to analyse the data set and identify evidence-based policy and service responses.

Noted.

The Australian Government is committed to the development of evidence-based research policy and programs, underpinned by research and data. The Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW) is an independent statutory agency, funded by governments to produce authoritative and accessible information and statistics to inform and support better policy and service delivery decisions and has expertise in delivering national longitudinal data assets.

In the 2021-22 Budget, the Australian Government committed \$1.2 million over 4 years to the AIHW to maintain and enhance the Housing Data Dashboard website at www.housingdata.gov.au

5. The Committee recommends that the Australian Government and state and territory governments, in consultation with community housing providers, improve the availability, quality and consistency of data on community housing and Indigenous community housing.

Supported in principle.

The Australian Government has committed \$4.8 million to data improvement activities under the National Housing and Homelessness Agreement (NHHA) Data Improvement Plan (DIP) and states collectively match this, with an overall contribution of \$9.6 million. The DIP aims to improve and develop the evidence base for housing and homelessness policy, research and evaluation. States contributed to the development of the DIP. On 16 April 2021, the Council on Federal Financial Relations endorsed the housing and homelessness DIP as Schedule E under the NHHA.

The Housing and Homelessness Data Working Group (HHDWG) is working to improve and guide DIP deliverables, governance and timelines. The HHDWG Community Housing sub-group is developing agreed data development and data collection and supply tool priorities for the Community Housing and Indigenous Community Housing collections.

By the second quarter of 2023, the HHDWG or a subsequent working group will develop recommendations for activities and further improvements to include in a new DIP, for the period 2023-2028.

6. The Committee recommends that the Australian Government work with state and territory governments to ensure the regular publication of statistics on residential tenancy evictions, giving consideration to the need to establish a common framework for such data.

Supported in principle.

The Australian Government supports improved transparency and data consistency. However, states are responsible for data collection on residential tenancy evictions. Any decision to change data reporting is a decision for states. If states choose to publish this data, the Australian Government is willing to work with them to develop a consistent reporting framework and publish data on www.housingdata.gov.au

7. The Committee recommends that the Australian Government, including through the introduction of mandatory requirements on state and territory governments, improve data collection and reporting on housing stock and overcrowding to assist with monitoring and evaluation, planning and strategic investment at a regional and community level.

The Committee further recommends specific measures to improve data relating to housing outcomes for Indigenous Australians to inform all governments' efforts to meet the *National Agreement on Closing the Gap* target on housing.

Supported in principle.

Changes to data and collection reporting requirements under the National Housing and Homelessness Agreement or any future housing and homelessness agreements will be subject to negotiation between the Australian Government and states.

Under the National Agreement on Closing the Gap, work is underway to improve data collected in relation to Indigenous housing and homelessness. The Data and Reporting Working Group (DRWG) is working with all parties to the National Agreement in develop a Data Development Plan, due to be considered by Joint Council in July 2022. The DRWG is chaired by the National Indigenous Australians Agency and reports to the Closing the Gap Partnership Working Group.

8. The Committee recommends that the Australian Government and state and territory governments, in consultation with homelessness and community services, improve data collection and reporting on the COVID-19 vaccination of Australians experiencing homelessness, particularly rough sleepers.

Noted.

States are responsible for managing community and health services in their jurisdictions. Individuals are not required to report their residential living arrangements at the point of vaccination. The Department of Health is working with Primary Health Networks (PHN) to support the vaccination of vulnerable populations, including people experiencing homelessness. There is limited personal data captured by PHNs on the vaccination of these vulnerable cohorts through the targeted and tailored vaccination solutions being implemented (such as pop-up clinics); however, vaccination details are recorded through normal channels such as the Australian Immunisation Register and My Health Record.

9. The Committee recommends that the Australian Government, in consultation with state and territory governments, develop a needs-based funding methodology to be applied to future inter-governmental housing and homelessness funding agreements, to be completed no later than June 2022.

Noted.

The Australian Government allocates National Housing and Homelessness Agreement (NHHA) homelessness component funding to states in accordance with each state's share of total homelessness, based on the 2006 ABS Census estimates.

As specified by the NHHA, the Productivity Commission's review into the NHHA will examine the NHHA's effectiveness in meeting its objectives. The NHHA's objectives are to contribute to improving access to affordable, safe and sustainable housing preventing and addressing homelessness, and supporting social and economic participation.

Any future negotiations will be informed by the recommendations of the review and will be subject to negotiations between the Australian Government and states.

10. The Committee recommends that the Australian Government undertake an evaluation of Australian Government sponsored social and affordable housing projects, including those delivered by state and territory governments, to be completed no later than June 2022.

Noted.

Under the National Housing and Homelessness Agreement (NHHA), states are responsible for determining the priorities and types of services funded, including social and affordable housing projects. Every year, states are required to provide a Statement of Assurance to the Australian Government by 31 October. States must also report on the reforms and initiatives agreed, as specified in their bilateral agreements.

As specified by the NHHA, the Productivity Commission's review into the NHHA will examine the NHHA's effectiveness in meeting its objectives. The NHHA's objectives are to contribute to improving access to affordable, safe and sustainable housing preventing and addressing homelessness, and supporting social and economic participation.

11. The Committee recommends that the Australian Government commission an independent review of Commonwealth Rent Assistance, which should consider the maximum rates and method of indexation of the payment and its interaction with other relevant payments.

Not supported.

Commonwealth Rent Assistance (CRA) parameters, including maximum rates and indexation, have been considered in several reviews, namely:

- Australia's Future Tax System Review (2010)
- A New System for Better Employment and Social Outcomes (2015)
- Retirement Income Review (2020)

DSS monitors the effectiveness of CRA for recipient households by using internal administrative data. This data captures CRA recipient households by primary payment, household type, demographic information, median entitlements, median rent, and income data including rental stress. CRA data is reported on data.gov.au and through DSS' annual report.

12. The Committee recommends that the Australian Government waive or refinance at a concessional rate the historical housing-related debts of state and territory governments, in exchange for:

- **an amount equal to the savings to each jurisdiction being reinvested into affordable housing, with 50 per cent of new housing stock to be leased to community housing providers; and**
- **agreement on appropriate planning and zoning reforms in each jurisdiction.**

Not supported.

The Australian Government considers requests from states to waive or refinance their debts with the Australian Government on their merits. Waiving or refinancing state debts has a negative impact on the Australian Government's net debt position.

The Australian Government remains committed to working with the states on housing matters and it continues to provide significant housing support to states through the National Housing and Homelessness Agreement.

13. The Committee recommends that the Australian Government, in consultation with state and territory governments, review the national priority homelessness cohorts identified in the National Housing and Homelessness Agreement and determine whether new cohorts should be added and/or whether existing cohorts should be removed.

Noted.

As stated in clause B3 of the National Housing and Homelessness Agreement (NHHA), states may identify other priority homelessness cohorts in their respective bilateral schedules. For example, the Western Australia bilateral schedule identifies older women as an additional cohort.

As specified by the NHHA, the Productivity Commission's review will examine the NHHA's effectiveness in meeting its objectives. The NHHA's objectives are to contribute to improving access to affordable, safe and sustainable housing, preventing and addressing homelessness, and supporting social and economic participation.

Changes to the NHHA or any future housing and homelessness agreements, including homelessness cohorts, will be subject to negotiation between the Australian Government and states.

14. The Committee recommends that the Australian Government, in consultation with state and territory governments, consider strengthening the requirements on state and territory governments in relation to national and state-specific priority homelessness cohorts listed in the National Housing and Homelessness Agreement.

This should include considering requirements such as:

- **formal consultation with representative groups from priority cohorts;**
- **dedicated funding for measures to address priority cohorts; and**
- **additional evaluation of and reporting on measures taken to address priority cohorts.**

Supported in principle.

Under the National Housing and Homelessness Agreement (NHHA), states are required to have publicly available housing and homelessness strategies that address the NHHA housing priority policy areas, relevant to their jurisdictions, and outline reforms or initiatives that reduce the incidence of homelessness for the NHHA priority homelessness cohorts.

The NHHA priority homelessness cohorts are older people, women and children affected by family and domestic violence, children and young people, Indigenous Australians, people experiencing repeat homelessness, and people exiting institutions and care into homelessness. States may also identify additional priority homelessness cohorts in their respective bilateral schedules.

States are responsible for administering homelessness services. This includes consultation with representative groups from homelessness priority cohorts, dedicated funding to address priority cohorts, and evaluating and reporting on measures to address priority cohorts.

As specified by the NHHA, the Productivity Commission's review into the NHHA will examine the NHHA's effectiveness in meeting its objectives. The NHHA's objectives are to contribute to improving access to affordable, safe and sustainable housing preventing and addressing homelessness, and supporting social and economic participation.

Changes to the NHHA or any future housing and homelessness agreements will be subject to negotiation between the Australian Government and states.

15. The Committee recommends that the Australian Government and state and territory governments provide funding for additional crisis, emergency and transitional accommodation, and associated support services including pathways to long-term accommodation, for people at risk of homelessness. This should include dedicated funding for accommodation for victim-survivors of family, domestic and sexual violence.

In addition, the Committee reiterates Recommendation 75 of the report of its inquiry into family, domestic and sexual violence, that the Australian Government and state and territory governments consider funding emergency accommodation for perpetrators of such violence, to prevent victim-survivors from having to leave their homes.

Supported in principle.

As part of the 2021-22 Budget, the Australian Government announced \$144.8 million in funding for a two-year trial of the Escaping Violence Payment (EVP). The EVP will assist women leaving a violent relationship to access financial assistance of up to \$5,000. This includes a cash payment of up to a maximum of \$1,500 and the remainder in goods, services and support. The EVP is available across Australia through the UnitingCare Network. Further information on the EVP, including how individuals can access this program is available at www.unitingvictas.org.au/escaping-violence-payment

The Australian Government considers it unacceptable more than 10,000 women and children who have experienced family and domestic violence are turned away from emergency accommodation every year. This is why the Government has committed \$72.6 million in the Safe Places Emergency Accommodation (Safe Places) program to provide new or expanded emergency accommodation for women and children escaping family and domestic violence.

Safe Places is a capital works grant program funding the renovation, building or purchase of dwellings to create safe emergency accommodation. The Safe Places program will provide about 780 new safe places and assist about 6,340 women and children escaping family and domestic violence each year. Funding is being provided across all states and territories, in remote, regional and metropolitan areas.

Under the National Housing and Homelessness Agreement, states are responsible for determining priorities and the type and locations of services funded. States also make decisions about social housing, including the building, allocation and refurbishment of dwellings.

The House of Representatives Standing Committee on Social Policy and Legal Affairs Inquiry into family, domestic and sexual violence report makes 88 recommendations which seek to inform the development of the National Plan to end violence against women and children. These recommendations are being considered by the Australian, state and territory governments alongside the findings of other consultation activities and advice from advisory bodies. The Australian Government will table its response to the inquiry after finalising the next National Plan.

16. The Committee recommends that the Australian Government work with state and territory governments to ensure the availability of an appropriate proportion of social housing and transitional, crisis and emergency accommodation which is accessible and appropriate for people with diverse needs, including but not limited to:

- **older people;**
- **people living with disability;**
- **people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds; and**
- **Indigenous Australians.**

Supported in principle.

States are responsible for housing and homelessness services, including making decisions about the building, allocation and refurbishment of social housing dwellings. Under the National Housing and Homelessness Agreement (NHHA), states are required to have publicly available housing and homelessness strategies that address the NHHA housing priority policy areas, relevant to their jurisdictions, and outline reforms or initiatives that reduce the incidence of homelessness for the NHHA priority homelessness cohorts.

The NHHA priority homelessness cohorts include groups of vulnerable people with diverse needs, such as older people and Indigenous Australians. Consistent with this, states may also identify other priority groups such as people living with a disability and people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds in their respective bilateral agreements. The NHHA utilises a place based approach and states make decisions on funding for cohort-specific support in line with their primary responsibility for providing housing and homelessness supports.

As specified by the NHHA, the Productivity Commission's review into the NHHA will examine the NHHA's effectiveness in meeting its objectives. The NHHA's objectives are to contribute to improving access to affordable, safe and sustainable housing preventing and addressing homelessness, and supporting social and economic participation.

In addition to actions under the NHHA, the Australian Government notes a number of jurisdictions are currently progressing commitments to increase the supply of accessible social housing for the individual cohorts identified by the recommendation.

Responsibility for the provision of accommodation for people with disability is a shared responsibility between the Australian Government and states. The division of responsibilities of different sectors delivering supports to people with a disability is set out in the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) Applied Principles and Tables of Support, which seeks to guide the interaction between the NDIS and mainstream supports, agreed by the Council of Australian Governments in 2013.

The Australian Government and states, through Disability Ministers, are continuing to work to improve the availability of short, medium and longer-term accommodation options, provided through the National Disability Insurance Scheme and mainstream systems, for all people living with disability.

17. The Committee recommends that the Australian Government work with state and territory governments to establish nationally consistent tenancy legislation for victim-survivors of family, domestic and sexual violence to terminate a tenancy when they need to leave a home, or alternatively maintain an existing tenancy when a perpetrator is removed from a home.

Supported in principle.

The Australian Government supports helping victim survivors of family, domestic and sexual violence to stay in their homes or to end their tenancy if they need to leave.

States are responsible for setting and implementing residential tenancy legislation. Consistent with this, New South Wales and Western Australia have already established legislation addressing tenancy laws in the context of family violence, which enable service of a Domestic Violence Termination Notice supported by a certificate or declaration from a competent person who is aware of the tenant's circumstances. This provides a more efficient process to terminate a lease in family and domestic violence circumstances.

As part of the Third Action Plan 2016-2019 of the National Plan to Reduce Violence against Women and their Children 2010 2022, the Australian Government funded a national survey on the impact of tenancy laws on women and children leaving violence. The final report, *Impact of Tenancy Laws on Women and Children Escaping Violence*, released in March 2021, identifies key principles for tenancy management and legislative intervention affecting family and domestic violence victim-survivors, and perpetrators.

Principle 2 is to develop residential tenancy legislation in each state which reflects a nationally consistent process, enabling women and children fleeing family and domestic violence to do so quickly and safely. Copies of the report were also shared with states.

18. Recognising the association between substance abuse and homelessness, the Committee recommends that the Australian Government work with state and territory governments to implement further measures to reduce alcohol-related harms at a whole-of-population level.

In addition, the Committee reiterates Recommendation 60 of the report of its inquiry into family, domestic and sexual violence for a public health approach to preventing and managing drug and alcohol related harms experienced by families and children, involving all jurisdictions, including local governments.

Supported.

The Australian Government is committed to preventing and minimising alcohol, tobacco and other drug-related health, social, cultural and economic harms among individuals, families and communities. Further, the Australian Government is committed to collaborating and working in partnership with states and local governments to implement measures to reduce drug and alcohol-related harms, including in respect to homelessness and family, domestic and sexual violence.

These commitments are outlined in the National Drug Strategy 2017-2026 (NDS) and the National Alcohol Strategy 2019-2028 (NAS). The NDS provides a national framework which identifies national priorities relating to alcohol, tobacco and other drugs and outlines a national commitment to harm minimisation. The NAS provides a national framework to prevent and minimise alcohol-related harms by identifying agreed national priority areas of focus and policy options. The priority areas of focus are:

- improving community safety and amenity
- managing alcohol availability, price and promotion
- supporting individuals to obtain help and systems to respond
- promoting healthier communities.

Implementation of these strategies is a shared responsibility of the Australian Government, state and territory governments, local governments, and non-government sectors.

The NDS and NAS recognise the relationship between homelessness and alcohol and other drug use; and that housing is an important protective factor in terms of alcohol and other drug treatment. The strategies also recognise that harmful alcohol consumption is a risk factor for family, domestic and sexual violence.

The Australian Government is investing more than \$880 million over four years (from 1 July 2020) through the Drug and Alcohol Program to support drug and alcohol treatment services as well as a number of prevention, research and communication activities. Although states are the primary funders of drug and alcohol treatment services, the Australian Government investment includes more than \$690 million over four years (from 1 July 2020) for drug and alcohol treatment services and national leadership. This includes funding for a number of drug and alcohol treatment services that provide specific services to people experiencing homelessness, including women and children, as priority populations.

Under the Drug and Alcohol Program, the Australian Government is also providing funding to a range of programs to support families and friends impacted by drug and alcohol use. This includes funding of \$3.9 million to the Alcohol and Drug Foundation (ADF) to develop an evidence based toolkit to provide additional support for families and friends of people experiencing harm from drugs and alcohol. The Path2Help resource developed through this project is a new information and support directory that contains more than 7,000 services nationwide for Australians who may need information for themselves or their loved ones about alcohol and other drug use. The ADF is also working to build the capacity and expertise of services available to the friends and families of people who use drugs and alcohol, and support research in this important area.

The House of Representatives Standing Committee on Social Policy and Legal Affairs Inquiry into family, domestic and sexual violence report makes 88 recommendations which seek to inform the development of the National Plan to end violence against women and children. These recommendations are being considered by the Australian, state and territory governments alongside the findings of other consultation activities and advice from advisory bodies. The Australian Government will table its response to the inquiry after finalising the next National Plan.

19. The Committee recommends that the Australian Government lead the development of a national integrated approach to housing and homelessness services for Indigenous Australians, co-designed with Indigenous community-controlled organisations and grounded in the principle of self-determination.

Noted.

The Australian Government is working with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, and their communities, all levels of government, organisations and businesses to implement the new National Agreement on Closing the Gap.

Target 9 of the National Agreement seeks to increase the proportion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders living in appropriately sized (not overcrowded) housing to 88 per cent, from 78.9 per cent at the 2016 Census. Responsibility for housing is primarily a matter for states. The states control the primary levers for housing including funding, land release and zoning laws, and are responsible for meeting Target 9 in their own jurisdictions.

Under Priority Reform 1 of the National Agreement, housing is one of the 5 sectors identified for shared decision-making and policy partnerships between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and governments. Under Clause 38, a Housing Policy Partnership Working Group will be established in 2022 that will include Government and Indigenous housing sector representatives.

Under Priority Reform 2 of the National Agreement – building the community-controlled sector – a Sector Strengthening Plan Working Group will produce a Housing Sector Strengthening Plan (the Plan) for the Joint Council by April 2022. Recognising co-design is a key feature of the National Agreement, the new Indigenous housing peak, the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Housing Authority (NATSIHA), is leading the drafting of the Plan with support from the Government.

The Plan aims to provide a national approach for building the Indigenous community controlled housing sector. Homelessness has been included for consideration in the scope of the Plan as has the opportunities for synergies, cross-sectoral linkages and intersectionality. The Plan will also incorporate alignment with other relevant policies and strategies to ensure that sector strengthening efforts leverage work planned or already being undertaken to ensure long term sustainability of initiatives including through mainstream systems.

20. The Committee recommends that the Australian Government work with state and territory governments to review public order offences and other offences that disproportionately affect people experiencing homelessness, particularly rough sleepers, and those in a cycle of homelessness, with a view to minimising enforcement-based responses to homelessness.

This should include consideration of sentencing practices and bail conditions for public order offences and the need for effective integration of legal, social, health and other agencies to create pathways out of the justice system.

Noted.

States are responsible for administering criminal justice systems within their jurisdictions, including police services, courts and correctional services.

21. The Committee recommends that the Australian Government work with state and territory governments to implement strategies to address the risk of exiting into homelessness from state institutions, including hospitals, mental health facilities, correctional institutions and out-of-home-care, including developing a nationally consistent approach to discharge planning and a national definition of ‘no exit into homelessness’.

The Australian Government should also work with state and territory governments to better integrate housing and mental health support services.

Supported in principle.

The National Housing and Homelessness Agreement (NHHA) enables tailored and localised approaches to place based issues. Under the NHHA, states are required to have publicly available housing and homelessness strategies outlining initiatives addressing housing priority policy areas and contributing to a reduction in homelessness for the priority cohorts, including those exiting institutions. This allows for flexible and targeted responses to better address homelessness when compared to one size fits all centralised strategies.

Hospitals, mental health facilities, correctional facilities and out-of-home care are all institutions that are the responsibility of states. Through the Data Improvement Plan, the Australian Government is working with states to strengthen data transparency and definitions for the purposes of data collection and reporting in relation to these matters. The Australian Government notes improved availability of services, including transitional accommodation, is required to reduce the risk of exiting into homelessness into state institutions, however, housing, homelessness, hospitals, mental health facilities, correctional facilities and out-of-home care are state responsibilities.

States have discretion over implementing housing and homelessness initiatives within their jurisdictions, including strategies to address the risk of exiting into homelessness from state institutions. States are required to report to the Australian Government by 31 October each year on the progress against the actions in their bilateral agreements.

The Australian Government currently funds two Reconnect service providers who facilitate specialist support to young people who are exiting correctional institutions. In 2020-21, Reconnect provided support to over 7,700 young people.

The Australian Government is working with states and territories on improving mental health and suicide prevention supports through the development of a new National Mental Health and Suicide Prevention Agreement.

22. The Committee recommends that the Australian Government work with state and territory governments to ensure that:

- **adequate incentives are in place for social housing providers to accept tenants with high needs or who are at risk of repeat homelessness;**
- **adequate support is available for social housing tenants, particularly those with a history of episodic homelessness, to minimise re-entries into homelessness; and**
- **housing providers and support services are more accountable for the housing outcomes of the people they support.**

Supported in principle.

Under the National Housing and Homelessness Agreement (NHHA), states are responsible for administering social housing, including public and community housing, and homelessness services. States also make decisions about the building, allocation, refurbishment of social housing dwellings, complaints and all other tenancy matters.

Under the NHHA, states are required to have publicly available housing and homelessness strategies outlining initiatives addressing housing priority policy areas and contributing to a reduction in homelessness for the priority cohorts.

23. The Committee recommends that the Australian Government and state and territory governments expand the circumstances in which asylum seekers, particularly those on bridging visas, have the right to work and are able to access social housing, transitional, crisis and emergency accommodation, safe-at-home programs, and housing and homelessness services.

Noted.

Asylum seekers on Bridging visas generally have permission to work and access to Medicare. The Department of Home Affairs (DHA) also provides short-term support services to eligible non-citizens engaging with the DHA to resolve their immigration status (substantive visa grant or departure from Australia) through the Status Resolution Support Service (SRSS) program. Available services include financial support, orientation and accommodation support, health support (both physical and mental health support), access to education for school-age children, and case management. These services are delivered to eligible recipients to address or remove barriers to resolving their status, help manage vulnerabilities, meet domestic and international legal obligations, and address or remove barriers to status resolution.

Non-citizens with work rights are expected to work to support themselves and their families. SRSS is not a welfare program and SRSS providers and the DHA assess eligibility within the program settings agreed by the Australian Government.

States are responsible for determining eligibility for social housing, transitional, crisis and emergency accommodation, and other housing and homelessness services.

24. The Committee recommends that the Australian Government together with state and territory governments increase investment in economic development and other measures to enhance employment opportunities in rural and regional areas. This should include the creation of new traineeships and apprenticeships in the mining, renewable energy, eco-tourism and technology sectors.

Supported in principle.

Australia's Vocational Education and Training (VET) system is undergoing structural reform to improve efficiency, transparency and confidence in the sector. Reforms will ensure all Australians, including those located in rural and regional areas, have access to high quality and relevant training and that the sector can respond to dynamic labour market conditions.

In 2021-22, the Australian Government is investing an estimated \$6.4 billion in VET, including \$2.0 billion in transfers to states to support delivery, \$3.8 billion in Commonwealth own programs including support for apprenticeships, and \$0.6 billion in student loans.

The Australian Government offers a range of incentives under the Australian Apprenticeships Incentives Program (AAIP) for eligible apprentices and their employers to encourage employers, including Group Training Organisations, to provide training opportunities and to assist with the cost of training.

Standard incentives are available at commencement and at completion of an Australian Apprenticeship, as well as a broad range of targeted incentives for specific groups, such as mature-aged workers and school-based apprentices. The AAIP also offers incentives for employers of apprentices in rural and regional locations in areas of national skills needs through the Rural and Regional Skills Shortage Incentive.

The program also provides a range of incentives and assistance to eligible Australian Apprentices, including the Living Away From Home Allowance (LAFHA). LAFHA provides financial assistance in the first three years of an Australian Apprenticeship where the Australian Apprentice has had to move away from their parent's or guardian's home in order to take up an Australian Apprenticeship, remain in an Australian Apprenticeship, or receive essential supplementary on-the-job training with another employer.

In addition, the Australian Government has announced the \$3.9 billion Boosting Apprenticeship Commencements (BAC) wage subsidy, which has rapidly boosted uptake of new Australian Apprentices. BAC is a commencement measure through which employers of any size that engage an Australian Apprentice between 5 October 2020 and 31 March 2022 can claim 50 per cent of the apprentice or trainee's wages paid for a 12-month period from the date of commencement, up to \$7,000 per quarter.

As at 18 November 2021, a total of \$434.7 million in claims have been paid to assist 21,908 employers in regional and remote areas, supporting 49,325 apprentices and trainees. This includes \$76.3 million in claims that have been paid to support 8,712 apprentices and trainees in regional and remote areas in the following industries:

- Accommodation and Food Services: 5,217 Apprentices and Trainees (\$39,630,227)
- Agriculture, Forestry and Fishing: 1,617 Apprentices and Trainees (\$14,301,094)
- Electricity, Gas, Water and Waste Services: 387 Apprentices and Trainees (\$4,578,041)
- Information Media and Telecommunications: 249 Apprentices and Trainees (\$2,514,215)
- Mining: 1,242 Apprentices and Trainees (\$15,279,095).

After 12 months of this support, employers will be eligible to transition to the recently announced, time-limited Completing Apprenticeship Commencements (CAC) wage subsidy for the second and third years of an apprenticeship. Under the CAC, eligible employers will receive a 10 per cent wage subsidy in the second year of an eligible apprenticeship, up to a maximum of \$1,500 per quarter per apprentice, and a 5 per cent wage subsidy in the third year of their apprenticeship, to a maximum of \$750 per quarter per apprentice.

Australian Apprenticeship Support Network (AASN) providers deliver support services to apprentices and employers across Australia through a network of close to 500 mobile field officers. This includes coverage of rural and remote areas of the country. AASN providers are paid a higher fee rate to provide face-to-face servicing in regional and remote communities in addition to there being specific contracts for the servicing of remote Western Australia and the Torres Strait Islands.

The Australian Government's \$276.3 million Local Jobs Program is being delivered in all 51 Employment Regions across Australia including in rural and regional areas, and brings together expertise, resources and access to funding at the local level to help job seekers connect to employment, reskilling and upskilling opportunities. As a place based program, the key focus is the identification and development of locally driven solutions to employment and training needs across all sectors of the economy for the benefit of businesses, jobseekers and the community. Projects to date have supported pre-employment and accredited industry-based training, micro credentials and traineeships/apprenticeships across a broad range of sectors including civil construction, mining, renewable energy, agriculture, healthcare, hospitality and tourism.

In addition, the Australian Government's Launch into Work program supports the delivery of pre-employment projects, which are primarily focused on creating long-term employment outcomes for women. Participation in a Launch into Work project provides women with training and mentoring to help them overcome barriers to their economic participation and provides a short pathway to financial independence and security, with a guaranteed job with participating employers on successful project completion. Projects to date have included jobs with regional employers, including roles in the renewable energy sector and facilities management roles in the mining sector.

Finally, the Australian Government is appointing a Regional Education Commissioner in response to recommendations of the National Regional Rural and Remote Tertiary Education Strategy. Anticipated to be appointed in the second half of 2021, the Commissioner will provide a national focus for regional, rural and remote education, with a broad remit across a student's educational lifespan from early childhood to tertiary education. The Commissioner will champion the cause of regional education, seeking to grow opportunities for VET and higher education opportunities in regional, rural and remote areas, with a central aim of at least halving the disparity between tertiary education outcomes between regional and metropolitan students by 2030.

25. The Committee recommends that the Australian Government establish a comprehensive strategy to address the financial insecurity of older women. This should include consideration of:

- **measures relating to superannuation and income support with a view to improving financial outcomes for women; and**
- **the need for new data collection and reporting measures, including new national data sets, to inform policies and strategies targeted at older women.**

Noted.

There are a number of Australian Government measures in place to provide financial support and improved retirement outcomes for women. This includes the Age Pension and Commonwealth Rent Assistance, subsidised health care and concessions on a range of goods and services, as well as measures to assist women to build their retirement savings throughout their lifetime. These measures include the low income superannuation tax offset and a Government co-contribution for low or middle income earners who make after-tax superannuation contributions.

The Government continue to assess further policy measures to support the financial security of older women.

Additionally, older people, including older women, are a priority homelessness cohort under the National Housing and Homelessness Agreement.

26. The Committee recommends that the Australian Government, in cooperation with state and territory governments, fund data collection and research to address gaps in evidence relating to the prevalence of homelessness and demand for support services among specific vulnerable groups, including but not limited to:

- **older women;**
- **people living in regional, rural and remote areas;**
- **veterans; and**
- **LGBTIQ+ people.**

Noted.

Under the National Housing and Homelessness Agreement (NHHA), states are required to have publicly available housing and homelessness strategies that address the NHHA housing priority policy areas, relevant to their jurisdictions, and outline reforms or initiatives that reduce the incidence of homelessness for the NHHA priority homelessness cohorts.

The NHHA priority homelessness cohorts are older people, women and children affected by family and domestic violence, children and young people, Indigenous Australians, people experiencing repeat homelessness, and people exiting institutions and care into homelessness. States may also identify other priority homelessness cohorts in their respective bilateral schedules.

Changes to the collection and research to address gaps in evidence for specific cohorts are agreed and prioritised through negotiations between the Australian Government and states.

27. The Committee recommends that the Australian Government work with state, territory and local governments and community organisations to develop a more integrated ‘place-based’ approach to homelessness prevention and early intervention. This should include:

- **establishing a national strategic framework for prevention and early intervention, setting out targets, roles and responsibilities, data collection and reporting requirements, and evaluation;**
- **identifying the structural support and resources required to support ‘place-based’ programs; and**
- **funding for ‘place-based’ research and pilot programs.**

Recognising the importance of stopping homelessness early in life, the Committee further recommends that there be a particular focus on prevention and early intervention of youth homelessness.

Noted.

States are primarily responsible for housing and homelessness service provision. In 2021-22, around \$131.8 million is set aside for homelessness services through the National Housing and Homelessness Agreement (NHHA), which states are required to match.

The NHHA enables localised approaches to varying place based issues. Under the NHHA, states are required to have publicly available housing and homelessness strategies outlining initiatives addressing priority policy reform areas and homelessness priority cohorts including children and young people. States make decisions around early intervention and prevention initiatives, which contribute to a reduction in homelessness for priority cohorts. This allows for flexible and targeted responses to better address homelessness when compared to one size fits all centralised strategies.

Australian Government is providing up to \$124 million over five years (to 30 June 2023) to deliver Reconnect, a community based early intervention and prevention program for young people aged between 12 to 18 years (or 12 to 21 years for newly arrived youth) experiencing or at risk of homelessness, and their families.

Reconnect aims to prevent homelessness and promote engagement with education, training, employment and the community. In 2020-21, Reconnect provided support to over 7,700 young people.

28. The Committee recommends that the Australian Government work with state and territory governments to strengthen training across the health and community sectors on prevention of and early intervention in homelessness, particularly for disadvantaged and vulnerable children and families.

This should include training on the impact of homelessness and family, domestic and sexual violence on the social and emotional wellbeing of children.

Supported in principle.

States are responsible for managing community and health services in their jurisdictions. This includes training for early intervention into homelessness and family, domestic and sexual violence. The Australian Government is prepared to work with the states to strengthen this training across the community and health sectors.

The Australian Government is working with states to establish a national Distress Intervention (DI) Trial. The DI Trial may support Australians who are at risk of homelessness by seeking to support individuals who experience early signs of psychological distress, at services where they present, to address immediate issues (e.g. crisis accommodation services, domestic violence support). Services to be included in the DI Trial will be considered in discussions with states. The trial is in response to the National Suicide Prevention Adviser's report recommendations.

29. The Committee recommends that the Australian Government work with state and territory governments to ensure that data collection and reporting systems adequately capture the experiences and needs of disadvantaged and vulnerable children and families, in order to support the early identification, assessment, support and/or referral of those experiencing or at risk of homelessness.

Supported in principle.

National data sharing and linkage infrastructure to facilitate improved insights into vulnerable children and families is part of formal arrangements between the Australian Government and states.

The Australian Government is committed to the development of evidence-based research policy and programs, underpinned by research and data activities. Changes to data collection and reporting relating to children and families under formal arrangements is subject to negotiation between the Australian Government and states. These agreements must recognise and reflect the Australian Government and states' respective legislative and regulatory requirements.

30. The Committee recommends that the Australian Government, in making relevant funding agreements with state and territory governments and housing providers, incorporate the principles of 'Housing First', particularly for any priority groups identified in those agreements.

Noted.

Under the NHHA, states are primarily responsible for housing and homelessness service provision, and have discretion to direct funding towards innovative approaches like Housing First for priority cohorts. In 2021-22, around \$131.8 million is set aside for homelessness services through the National Housing and Homelessness Agreement (NHHA), which states are required to match. Several states are planning or have established Common Grounds facilities, a type of Housing First model.

Changes to the NHHA or any future housing and homelessness agreements will be subject to negotiation between the Australian Government and states. As specified by the NHHA, the Productivity Commission's review into the NHHA will examine the NHHA's effectiveness in meeting its objectives. The NHHA's objectives are to contribute to improving access to affordable, safe and sustainable housing preventing and addressing homelessness, and supporting social and economic participation. Any future negotiations will be informed by the recommendations of the review and will be subject to negotiations between the Australian Government and states.

31. The Committee recommends that the Australian Government, in consultation with state, territory and local governments, seek to increase affordable housing supply when land is rezoned for residential development, through the introduction and harmonisation of inclusionary planning approaches across Australia.

Noted.

Under the National Housing and Homelessness Agreement, states are required to have publicly available housing and homelessness strategies outlining initiatives addressing housing priority policy areas and contributing to a reduction in homelessness. Planning and zoning reform and initiatives are a housing priority policy area, which should be incorporated into states' housing strategies where appropriate to their needs. Consistent with this, several states are implementing inclusionary zoning in their jurisdictions.

The Australian Government encourages states to designate an appropriate proportion of affordable housing at sites where residential development is feasible. Additionally, under the Commonwealth Property Disposal Policy, the sale of Australian Government land suitable for housing should include affordable housing initiatives, such as inclusionary zoning, where practical.

32. The Committee recommends that the Australian Government, through the National Housing and Finance Investment Corporation, investigate opportunities for attracting greater private-sector investment in social and affordable housing, including from superannuation funds.

Supported.

States are responsible for making decisions about social housing, including the building, allocation, refurbishment of dwellings, complaints and all other tenancy matters.

The National Housing and Finance Investment Corporation (NHFIC) has attracted just under \$2 billion in private capital in just over 3 years to finance social and affordable housing through issuing its social and sustainability bonds. NHFIC will continue to engage actively with a range of potential investors, including superannuation funds, to explore opportunities for attracting further private capital for investing in new social and affordable housing projects.

As part of the Government's response to the Recommendations in the Statutory Review of the Operation of the National Housing Finance and Investment Corporation (NHFIC) Act 2018 report, the Government committed to providing NHFIC an explicit mandate to encourage and enable the participation of private financiers in the supply of social and affordable housing.

33. The Committee recommends that the Australian Government work with state, territory and local governments to:

- **ensure the appropriate allocation of social and affordable housing stock to meet the needs of individuals and families at different life stages and accommodate different household family structures;**
- **in appropriate circumstances and locations, amend local government restrictions on secondary dwellings ('granny flats'); and**
- **consider new measures to encourage the use of secondary dwellings to free up primary dwellings for larger families, including grants to Indigenous community-controlled organisations to construct new secondary dwellings.**

Supported in principle.

States are responsible for making decisions about social housing, including the building, allocation, refurbishment of dwellings, complaints and all other tenancy matters.

Under the National Housing and Homelessness Agreement, states are required to have publicly available housing and homelessness strategies outlining initiatives addressing housing priority policy areas and contributing to a reduction in homelessness for the priority cohorts. States have discretion over implementing housing and homelessness initiatives within their jurisdictions. This includes planning and zoning reform initiatives.

34. The Committee recommends that the Australian Government work with state and territory governments toward implementing consistent national legislation imposing a 'three strikes' policy for the eviction of social and affordable housing tenants who repeatedly breach their tenancy obligations.

Noted.

States are responsible for setting and implementing residential tenancy legislation, including for social and affordable housing.

35. The Committee recommends that the Australian Government, in consultation with state, territory and local governments, develop and implement a ten-year national strategy on homelessness. The scope of a national strategy should include, but not be limited to:

- **creating new and strengthening existing arrangements for inter-governmental coordination and funding accountability of state and territory governments;**
- **formally recognising and strengthening the role of local government;**
- **identifying opportunities for greater involvement of community organisations and the private sector;**
- **encompassing existing arrangements under the National Housing and Homelessness Agreement and reflecting other relevant Australian Government policies and programs; and**
- **giving effect to other relevant recommendations made in this report.**

Not supported.

The National Housing and Homelessness Agreement (NHHA) is the current Australian Government mechanism to deliver housing and homelessness funding to states.

The upcoming Productivity Commission's review into the NHHA is expected to examine the effectiveness of the NHHA; however, the NHHA recognises the Australian Government and states have a mutual interest in improving housing and homelessness outcomes across Australia.

The NHHA enables localised approaches to place based issues. Bilateral agreements between the Australian Government and individual states require states to have publicly available housing and homelessness strategies. This allows for flexible and targeted responses to better address homelessness when compared to one size fits all centralised strategies.