



A Way Home Australia

In 2017-18 288,000 men, women and children sought help from Specialist Homelessness Services. Some 43 percent were young adults, adolescents and children - 43,180 young people (16%) aged 15-24 years on their own and 81,473 young parents and children. Many more young Australians experience homelessness now than a decade ago.

The main drivers of youth homelessness have significantly increased; the number of children in Out of Home Care have increased by some 85 percent over a decade; family and domestic violence remains a significant issue for the community; housing affordability in Australia has worsened; and more young people experience homelessness than since the NYC Inquiry into Youth Homelessness and the 2008 White Paper, The Road Home.

Is the next decade going to be simply the same as the previous decade? What needs to change so that the needs of the most disadvantaged Australians are actually met? What is the way forward?

On the 18th and 19th March, the National Youth Homelessness Conference brought together around 380 people including some of Australia's leading thinkers, NGOs, youth homelessness peak bodies, educationists, practitioners and young people who have had lived experienced of homelessness.

This Communique represents a resolve to build an alliance for change. It outlines some of the priorities that need to be addressed by Australian governments, community

stakeholders and all Australians who want really positive outcomes for the most disadvantaged young Australians.

PRIORITIES FOR ACTION

The National Youth Homelessness Conference appeals to all politicians, who care about what many of our young people have to deal with, to actively support the following priorities. Our national effort needs to be strategic, adequately resourced and coherently national unlike the present arrangements.

A National Strategy Plan for Ending Youth Homelessness is required - a long-term effort to end youth homelessness, as part of a national strategy and plan as is done in other high priority areas of social policy.

A commitment from COAG that funding provided through the National Housing and Homelessness Agreement will be annually adjusted in line with CPI and population growth.

In practical terms, this Conference urges COAG to invest in four strategic reforms that if adequately resourced will significantly begin to address youth homelessness in Australia.

THE FOUR PROPOSED STRATEGIC REFORMS ARE:

1. Early Intervention

Without early intervention to stem the flow of young people into homelessness, the problems will continue as has been the case over the past decade. We need to arrest incipient issues leading to homelessness before crises arise. Rather than the status quo of disconnected programs running out of different department siloes, there is mounting evidence that an adequately funded place-based 'collective impact' approach to early intervention has the potential to be a game-changer. The internationally recognised Geelong Project or 'community of services and schools' COSS Model has demonstrated what is achievable on the ground and offers community-driven and community-based system reform

2. Rapid Rehousing

There is a need for a youth housing and homelessness strategy that delivers rapid rehousing for homeless young people; incorporates a major rethink of social housing as a viable transitional option for young people; and invests significantly in youth-specific and youth-appropriate housing options, including youth-specific social housing.

Housing alone is often not enough for homeless young people. Many also need to be supported through a successful transition to independence and well-being

3. Engagement

Everything we do to support disadvantaged young Australians has to address how to ensure they are sufficiently educated and trained up for a viable livelihood in a rapidly changing economy. Rather than the kinds of programs that have been rolled out for unemployed young people, a different way forward is called for - a place-based community approach that brings together employers, schools, training organisations, local government and other stakeholders to ensure that all young Australians are supported to achieve the best education, training, and employment outcomes possible.

4. Extending State Care

Urgent reform to the support provided to young people leaving the care and protection system. Experience in the Care and Protection system is a major driver of youth homelessness. These young people are possibly the most vulnerable cohort in terms of homelessness and further lifetime disadvantage. An urgent reform that will have a major impact is to adequately fund the support to young people in care until 21 years of age, with the Commonwealth providing 50 percent of the cost of extended care and on the basis of an agreed adequate national standard.

State and Territory governments have the primary responsibility for a number of these areas. However, proposed changes and reforms require Commonwealth Government leadership and investment will be needed to assist these reforms in the various jurisdictions.

This Communique represents the collective view of the 2019 National Youth Homelessness Conference delegates and attendees. Thank you to all conference delegates and attendees and our sponsors for their generosity and commitment to ending youth homelessness. Join the campaign to end youth homelessness and create 'A Way Home Australia.' For more info or to join the campaign go to www.awayhome.org.au