



Australia's Homeless Youth

A Report of the National Youth Commission
Inquiry into Youth Homelessness



An Independent Community Inquiry

Funding provided by
The CALEDONIA
Foundation

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Preface

The National Youth Commission Inquiry into Youth Homelessness (NYC) was an independent community inquiry funded by the Caledonia Foundation, a private philanthropic foundation focused on sustainable futures for young Australians. Caledonia's involvement in the NYC represents a bold philanthropic commitment to effect significant change for young people beyond the more traditional charitable funding of projects and property. Alongside the NYC Inquiry, a major feature documentary, *The Oasis*, was made by the award-winning documentary production company Shark Island Productions. Homeless young people participated in the film for over two years, courageously sharing their life experiences. Hopefully, both the NYC Inquiry report and the documentary film, in different but complementary ways, will shine new light on the issue of youth homelessness in Australia. We have reached a turning point in time, that will either be seen as a watershed for change or an opportunity lost forever.

The NYC Inquiry report has been a truly collective effort, drawing on evidence from 319 individuals, including some young people, who provided evidence to the National Youth Commission during 21 public hearings held around Australia. The Inquiry received 91 written submissions, including submissions from the Victorian Department of Human Services, the New South Wales Department of Housing, the Western Australian Department of Community Development, a joint submission from the Departments of Health and Community Services, Local Government, Housing and Sport and Chief Minister in the Northern Territory, and a detailed letter of support from the Queensland Government. Important assistance was rendered to the NYC by the organisations affiliated to the National Youth Coalition for Housing (NYCH), Homelessness Australia and the Council to Homeless Persons (CHP) in Victoria, who all widely promoted the Inquiry, assisted its work and contributed their considerable expertise and good ideas.

The problems identified are broadly similar to what was reported in the Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission Inquiry in 1989. Significantly, since that Inquiry, the Australian economy has improved substantially, yet there are more homeless young people. When Commissioner Brian Burdekin conducted the earlier inquiry, he remarked on the 'lack of research'. In 2008, we can report that this deficit has been significantly addressed. Why is youth homelessness more of a problem in 2008 than it was twenty years ago? What can be done about it? Our approach has been firmly solution-focused in an attempt to ensure that in twenty years, another inquiry will not report that youth homelessness is still a disturbing problem in Australian society – that would be admission of an extraordinary failure.

Many people have assisted this Inquiry, both formally and informally. As we travelled throughout Australia we sensed and observed that many ordinary Australians remain concerned about the plight of homeless young people and children. Compassion and goodwill far outweigh selfishness, individualism and cynicism. If our government(s) show leadership and resolve, we are convinced the community will rally behind them.

A number of experts have assisted the NYC Inquiry. Associate Professor Adam Steen from the Australian Catholic University contributed to the development of arguments about the costs and benefits of early intervention; Dr Sue Green reviewed the information and policy on care and protection; and Associate Professor Kath Hulse and Professor Terry Burke from Swinburne University provided advice on housing affordability. Professor Brian Burdekin, who headed the first independent inquiry into youth homelessness, and who launched the NYC Inquiry in March 2007, has been an inspiration for and a passionate supporter of the National Youth Commission Inquiry into Youth Homelessness from the outset.

Lastly, we express our appreciation to all the NYC staff associated directly with the Inquiry, who laboured tirelessly to achieve so much in such a short period of time: Mr Tony Ryan from Lodge Street Systems produced an innovative software application to support the writing team; The Youth Development Australia Manager Ms Yee Man Louie provided committed and highly efficient support to the NYC; Ms Kathleen Asjes supported the NYC during the hearings and Ms Louise Goebel contributed extensively throughout the work of the NYC; additional copy editing and proofing was done by Barry Gittins and Dawn Volz; finally, we especially extend our gratitude to NYC Senior Researcher/Writers Ms Tor Roxborough and Mr Dev Mukherjee, who contributed so much to the researching and writing of Australia's Homeless Youth.

National Youth Commission

2008

Letter to the Australian Community

The National Youth Commission Inquiry into Youth Homelessness is only the second inquiry, specifically focused on youth, to be conducted independently of government. The first was the landmark Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Inquiry headed by Brian Burdekin in 1989. As a result of the Burdekin Report, youth homelessness became an identifiable community problem and impetus was given to some important new initiatives. However, twenty years on, 'youth homelessness' is still with us. This is despite our nation experiencing its highest level of economic prosperity since the 1970s and the lowest unemployment for several decades. Moreover, Australia is predicted to reap billions of dollars in strong tax revenues from its natural resources over the next twenty years and beyond.

We face major global challenges such as climate change and in Australia, the serious issue of water supply and water usage. Issues like this require a degree of strategic and long-term bipartisan action without precedent. Social and economic problems such as 'youth homelessness' need to be on the political agenda in the same way. On behalf of homeless young Australians, we call on the Australian community to effectively eliminate youth homelessness over the next 25 years, and so enable all young Australians to contribute to and share in the social and economic benefits of our national prosperity.

2007-2008 is arguably a watershed year, coming at a time when we have the first evidence that it is possible to reduce youth homelessness, and yet, the burgeoning rental crisis and the issue of housing affordability have begun to affect the every day lives of many Australians, particularly young people. The accumulated deficit of past under-investment in public and community housing, and an ineffective mix of housing market incentives, means that housing affordability is a major challenge for the new Federal Government, and indeed all Australian governments.

Although 'youth homelessness' received a great deal of media attention following the HREOC Inquiry report, we have to face up to the fact that young people still become homeless and that youth homelessness is worse in 2008 than it was 20 years ago – the statistical evidence is that youth homelessness has doubled since Burdekin. Australia has been notable for its innovative service models, with some of the most creative and advanced models of homeless services to be found anywhere, yet for a long time, there has not been the political will to make the necessary social investment to begin reducing and ultimately eliminating youth homelessness.

No plan can anticipate every single measure that will be required over 25 years to deal with homelessness. However, with the right policy settings and progressive investment, the goal of eliminating homelessness is achievable. For much of the past 20 years, the funding and strategies for ameliorating homelessness have been constrained. Only early intervention emerged as a new priority, but the actual resources put into this area were never enough to reach the actual number of at-risk young people in need. Several states have attempted homelessness strategies and this more systematic approach surely

points the way forward. The test of whether youth homelessness is being substantially redressed will not be evident in national statistical data for at least five years and more likely ten years. Not everything that needs to be done can be done in a few short years – it takes time to plan, to train youth and social workers, and to implement new initiatives. The new Federal government has made ‘homelessness’ a priority issue. A new era of Commonwealth and state and territory cooperation has been foreshadowed. In the current Australian economic context, the acid test of success will be not in the absolute amount of funding for ‘youth homelessness’ over the first term of the new Government, but whether or not the right policy settings have been put in place, with a commitment to progressively fund these strategies for the next five, ten and up to twenty years.

Practical reform to achieve new forms of ‘joined-up’ government and social programs is overdue, having rested in the ‘too hard’ basket for too long. The reform agenda will not be a simple one to enact and the inertia of existing practices and habits is considerable. However, beyond that, or perhaps as part of it, the way Australian political parties and governments have typically behaved will need to change also. On some issues – and youth homelessness is one such issue - a high degree of bipartisanship already exists, but short-term thinking in terms of four-year electoral cycles needs to give way to a larger-scale vision, long-term strategic planning and sustained implementation.

The considered view of the NYC Commissioners is that we need to discover a new discourse about ‘need’ and courageously use measures of need as the benchmarks for assessing how much public money needs to be expended on programs and initiatives. With all due regard for cost-efficiency, tackling youth homelessness will require some large amounts of public funds over the long-term, however, the net benefit to the Australian community of successful intervention is much greater in dollar terms than the cost of failure and inaction.

Our Inquiry gathered evidence from a wide range of informants. The wisdom and policy insights of a large number of dedicated, competent professionals and other interested people have informed the recommendations in the report. Thus, the National Youth Commission report and its proposals are a collective achievement of the many people who gave up time, and contributed their knowledge, experience and creative insights. We respectfully offer this report to the Australian community and to the Commonwealth and all state and territory governments, on behalf of homeless young Australians.

Major David Eldridge (NYC Chair)

Associate Professor David Mackenzie

Ms Narelle Clay A.M.

Father Wally Dethlefs

April 8, 2008

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Roadmap for Youth Homelessness

The development and implementation of a framework and a national action plan on homelessness is imperative. One of the lessons from the past ten to fifteen years is that policy has been unevenly attended to and there has been no nationally planned approach. Despite a no-growth budget, there has been good cooperative oversight of SAAP, but JPET and Reconnect have been developed separately. There is no common data collection across all homeless programs and program decisions are not strongly coordinated.

The Roadmap for Youth Homelessness highlights the 10 ‘must do’ strategic areas for action. Implementing the core 10 points of the Roadmap would change the face of youth homelessness in Australia. This proposed new approach to youth homelessness will be a complex developmental process requiring policy multi-tasking and new ways of connecting different areas of policy and programs – but all the core ingredients need to be in play.

1. Develop and implement a National Framework and National Homelessness Action Plan

Australia needs a new commitment from Commonwealth, state and territory governments on homelessness, a national framework and a national action plan, including:

- A national aspirational horizon – the goal of eliminating youth homelessness by 2030;
- Appropriate structures and processes designed to work across election cycles in a bipartisan way;
- Specific targets over the short, medium and long-term;
- Strategies that set out realistically how targets will be reached;
- A youth-centred focus for service provision and programs;
- Review and public monitoring so that progress can be recognised and problems identified against the needs of homeless young people.

2 Affordable housing for young people

The affordable housing crisis has developed as a result of decades of policy neglect and under-funding. The NYC supports a broad affordable housing strategy as a new framework for explicitly addressing the needs of low income and disadvantaged Australians. Under this approach, there will need to be: (a) a multi-billion dollar investment in public and community housing; (b) taxation incentives to encourage affordable private rental housing, and (c) explicit policies and housing form designs and locations that facilitate access for young people. The NYC recommends:

- the development of a new national affordable housing strategy for Australia, with explicit attention to the needs of young people and in particular disadvantaged young people.

3 Refocus service provision on building and resourcing ‘communities of services’

The way governments and departments divide up geographical areas for funding and program delivery is confusing, contradictory and uncoordinated, with little progress since the Burdekin Report in 1989. Building ‘communities of services’ is a concept that will require all government departments to work towards agreed compatible geographical templates based on actual communities of people. Large Local Government Areas (LGAs) or clusters of small LGAs are probably the closest spatial unit to actual communities. Community capacity building has entered the rhetoric of the community services sector, but there is a major challenge in how it could be operationalised. Ultimately, whatever is done needs to be available to all communities in Australia. An estimated minimum funding goal of \$30 million per year would be required for a national approach to coordinating local youth service delivery. Funding should come from several Commonwealth Government departments, as well as the states and territories. This initiative will require:

- a refocus of Commonwealth and State/ Territory funding for services and programs on a common community level template;
- the provision of cross-sectoral/ cross-departmental resources to support the development of sustainable ‘communities of services’.

4 Prevent homelessness by supporting ‘at-risk’ families

If at-risk families are assisted in a flexible, practical needs-based way before they become homeless, then homelessness can be prevented. A small program known as HOME Advice has demonstrated that this is possible in 9 out of 10 cases. About one third of all SAAP clients are families with nearly 55,000 accompanying children. Preventive support to assist at-risk families using a proven model would have a major impact on the number of families entering SAAP. The HOME Advice evaluation has estimated that a conservative minimum of \$36 million would be required to develop an fully national program, but suggested more realistic funding of \$60-90 million per year. The NYC recommends that:

- the HOME Advice program be progressively expanded as a preventive response to homelessness for families at risk of becoming homeless.

5. Resource early intervention for at risk young people

School-based early intervention responses for recently homeless young people, such as the Reconnect program and other related early intervention support activities, have been effective in reducing homelessness. Researchers found that the reduction in the number of homeless 12-18 year olds from 26,060 in 2001 to 21,940 in 2006 is mostly attributed to ‘early intervention’. Early intervention works, but not enough is being done to have the effect it could have, so the Commonwealth Government needs to:

- treble Reconnect (from \$20 million to \$60 million per year) to reach a larger **proportion**

of the at-risk population and ensure that every community in the nation has sufficient early intervention capacity to impact on the number of young people at-risk of homelessness or recently homeless.

6. A new national approach for the care and protection of children in all states and territories

Australia's care and protection are in crisis. The Commonwealth Government to date has had little responsibility for care and protection, which for a long time has been a state responsibility. State programs are under-resourced and leaving care support needs major redevelopment. The lack of a national cooperative approach and timid reform agendas in the face of potentially adverse media are major barriers. A courageous and radical national review of care and protection is urgent. Beyond that, it is not possible to estimate how much reform will ultimately cost, but it is likely to require a significant increase in current expenditure. Young people who have been in state care are heavily over-represented in the population of homeless young people. The NYC urges immediate action including:

- a full Human Rights and Equal Opportunity inquiry to expose the issues and develop proposals for a national response.
- a strengthening of care and protection for at-risk 12-17 year olds;
- urgent remedial attention to staff resources and incentives for experienced staff to remain in a critical but difficult area;
- leaving care support on a needs-basis for all young people exiting care and protection.

7 Ensure supported accommodation is accessible in all communities

Supported accommodation (ie SAAP) remains a core component of Australia's response to homelessness and an exemplar of innovative diversity by international standards. This is despite the program being in a 'no-real-growth' position for over a decade. The homelessness sector needs strengthening to ensure that every community has the capacity for a supported accommodation response to youth homelessness. An estimate for an adequate extent of community-based supported accommodation might well be closer to \$500 million per year, than the \$348 million currently expended. It will be necessary to:

- expand supported accommodation using a national community template to ensure that every community can adequately provide supported accommodation for young people in need.

8 Redevelop employment, D&A and mental health programs for homeless young people

Employment is central to a sustainable livelihood for homeless young people. A continuum of labour market support programs need to be developed which address education barriers to employment; prepare young people for training; provide vocational training; and assist young homeless people to engage with the labour market. The absence of specialist and appropriate labour market options for disadvantaged young people has ensured that homeless young people have been largely excluded from participation in the 'full-employment' Australian economy.

Existing options for drug and alcohol services or mental health services are too often unable to provide timely assistance and treatment or are unable to accommodate young people who are wanting to address their drug and alcohol issues.

Drug treatment services for young people are uneven around Australia. In Victoria, drug services are funded to a level of \$15-16m per year. An additional \$5m per year would achieve state-wide coverage as well as providing sufficient outreach services at current levels of need. Other states spend less than Victoria. The proposed expansion of both mental health services and drug and alcohol programs will serve not just homeless young people but any young people who need this kind of assistance. To respond in these crucial areas, the NYC calls for:

- the development a national system of accessible drug and alcohol services for young people. National funding of an estimated \$100m would be required to deploy a system adequate to meet existing need, with an urgent need for \$20m initially.
- the development of a national program at an estimated cost of \$25m, to work intensively with homeless young people who have mental health issues, their families and the workers who support them.
- the construction a continuum of employment programs for homeless young people that incorporates JPET and offers appropriate foundation education, training, vocational options as well as new models of supported employment that builds new links with support and accommodation programs.

9 A new form of youth housing which links housing to education, training and employment programs

An Australian version of the UK/ European Foyer youth housing model should be developed that packages accommodation with other support, particularly education and training. Other initiatives might include accommodation for homeless school students, and 'boarding school' projects linked to Indigenous communities. One third of the homeless population are young people. The NYC recommends that:

- one-third of the \$150m committed by the Commonwealth Government on housing for homeless people should be applied to develop a new layer of youth housing for homeless young people, connected closely to education, training and employment.

10 Post-vention support

Returning to homelessness is common for young people because even after they find housing, problems can reoccur. Post-vention support for homeless young people would ensure that recycling back into homelessness is minimised. A new type of flexible, tailored, post-vention outreach support would ensure that young people can sustain their independent living arrangements. A fully developed national response would cost an estimated \$35 – 50 million per year. But, it would radically improve the outcomes of supported accommodation programs. Every homeless young person moving beyond supported accommodation should be able to access this kind of support. The NYC proposes that:

- all young people moving from SAAP into some form of independent living need to receive needs-based outreach support.

Any serious action to redress youth homelessness in Australia will require investment and strategic long-term planning. The NYC Roadmap is informed by the accumulated knowledge about homelessness formed over the past 20 years; it is do-able and it is affordable for a country such as Australia. In terms of preliminary costings, where there is existing evidence or a sufficient basis for making estimates, the NYC has made some preliminary estimates. However, these estimates exclude the costs associated with a reform of care and protection systems around Australia, and the additional services required in mental health and drug and alcohol fields to more effectively service that significant group of their clients who are homeless young people. The total cost of redressing the affordability of housing for young people could not reasonably be estimated at the time of this report, but it will require considerable public investment. Finally, the cost of reformed employment services for homeless young people have not been entered into this calculation. In terms of what can be estimated, over a decade, the total cost would be approximately \$1 billion in new money, which would amount to about \$100 million in the first term of the new Federal Government, or approximately \$20 million additional funds every year.

Executive Summary

1. The National Youth Commission Inquiry into Youth Homelessness in 2007 was an independent community inquiry funded by The Caledonia Foundation. The NYC held 21 days of hearings in all states and territories, heard evidence from 319 individuals, received 91 written submissions including from seven government departments and held four policy forums to discuss policy issues and solutions. The NYC upholds the human rights position of the Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission which conducted the first independent inquiry in 1987-89. It has extended this framework to the concept of 'social citizenship'. This means that the minimum standards of everyday life for homeless people should be the same as enjoyed by other members of the community. The terms of reference of the NYC Inquiry were six objectives that examined the problem of youth homelessness but importantly sought to develop solutions in terms of the 'adequacy of services', 'innovation', recommended 'actions to resolve and ameliorate the problem' and finally the inquiry considered what a 'new national accord' to deal seriously with this problem might look like.

2. The HREOC report in 1989, led to increased supported accommodation for young people and the IHSHY health initiative (approx \$4.4 million annually) as well as employment and training support in the form of JPET (\$19.9 million annually in 2005-6). However since the mid-nineties, there has been a stagnation of funding in real terms for areas such as supported accommodation (ie. SAAP) and over a long period of time, for public and community housing. The major new national initiative has been at the front end of early intervention with the Commonwealth Reconnect program (\$20 million annually). A second early intervention initiative by the Commonwealth was the small Family Homelessness Prevention Pilot Program. It commenced in 2001 and continued under a different name but with no increase beyond the eight agencies until 2008 (\$2.6 million annually). There have been several significant youth homelessness and early intervention initiatives by various states such as Victoria with the School Focused Youth Service, the Family Reconciliation and Mediation Program and YEETI. In Queensland there is the Youth Support Coordinators initiative (\$8 million annually).

3. Young people become homeless because of family breakdown, often stemming from parental conflicts or a collapse of their relationship with a husband/wife or partner. Some young people who are living independently become homeless because they can't afford living expenses including rent. Being homeless is unsafe, unhealthy and very stressful. Young people experiencing homelessness are not a homogenous group. They come from a range of family backgrounds, have diverse dispositions, expectations and desires, and they encounter services of varying quality. Their common needs are to have a stable home; friends; healthy nutrition; to be cared about as individuals; to have adequate

educational support; help when they need help; and reliable adults in their lives. The frustration, distress and anger expressed by many of the young people who submitted evidence indicates that Australia still struggles to meet their needs.

4. Homelessness is not 'rooflessness'. In Australia, it is widely accepted that homelessness should be broadly defined as being without shelter, in an improvised dwelling, in any form of temporary shelter including SAAP services or a temporary stay with a friend or acquaintance and residence in single rooms in boarding houses without facilities or security of tenure. In the ABS Census 2001, there were 100,000 homeless people - men, women and children - one third (36,173) were young people aged from 12 - 24 years of age. There were another 9,941 children under the age of 12. Both structural and individual factors cause homelessness for young people. The latest statistics in 2006 reveal 21,940 homeless teenagers aged 12-18, a decline from 26,060 in 2001. This drop has been attributed to the totality of early intervention between 2001 and 2006, not the decline in youth unemployment since the early nineties. On the other hand, the crisis in housing affordability and increased pressure on state care systems are factors that tend to drive homelessness upwards. In 2005-06, in terms of homeless people using SAAP services, 35.5 per cent of clients or 36,700 young Australians were young people. There was also an additional 54,700 children accompanying an adult(s). Turnaway rates as measured by the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare show that about half of the of potential clients of SAAP are not able to be accommodated on any night.

5. Youth homelessness does not involve a particular type of young person but a process of events that happen in a young person's life. The 'youth homeless career' is a typology of that process for young people, tracing the main changes that can occur following family breakdown. Young adults can become homeless when their relationship with a partner fails and they lose their accommodation because they are forced to leave the family home. Or, some young people can become homeless due to accumulating debt and a financial crisis resulting in loss of housing. Melbourne University's Project i examined the experiences of homeless young people in close detail in a longitudinal study of pathways through homelessness. The focus on 'careers' and pathways sensitises policy decision-makers about when to intervene and distinguishes different interventions along a time dimension. The emergence of 'early intervention' was bound up with the understanding of homelessness as a process.

6. Young people become homeless when primary family relationships breakdown. For young adults living independently, it will be the breakdown of the family unit they have formed that precipitates homelessness. The role of family in youth homelessness is much the same picture as presented in *Our Homeless Children*, some 20 years ago. Family breakdown is a broad term that includes such issues as mental illness, domestic violence, neglect, overcrowding, and generational poverty. Young people whose family support has broken down, leading to them going into state care, are particularly vulnerable to becoming homeless. However, when young people first become homeless, their friends and their friends' families often provide shelter and support. This is referred to by the

vernacular term 'couch-surfing'. Where young people have extended family members, grandmothers or aunts and uncles often try to help. Without resources and support, these informal social support networks typically breakdown. Young families with young children are a significant sub-group in the homeless population, with some 55,000 children passing through SAAP services in a year. The capacity to work with young homeless mothers or couples and their children needs to be improved systemically and a major prevention response must be implemented for families deemed at-risk of homelessness.

7. Homelessness is the most extreme form of poverty. In turn, living in poverty is one of the structural factors that leads to becoming homeless. While there has been a debate about how to measure poverty, the general consensus is that some 10 per cent of the population live in poverty relative to the rest of the community and the costs and living standards of Australia. In this category are Indigenous people, many single parents, and people who are long-term unemployed.

8. The Australian labour market has changed considerably over twenty years. Unemployment has come down. Unemployment is at record lows, including unemployment rates for young people, although for 15-19 year-olds the rate is still 12 per cent). Full-time work has remained steady, while part-time and casual jobs have increased. Many students also work. For homeless young people, taking advantage of the improved labour market is problematic. Being without stable accommodation is itself a major barrier, because a young person cannot do the normal things employees do, like wearing clean clothes and washing regularly. Transport can be a problem, while lack of skills due to early school leaving and a general unpreparedness for work are also issues. For homeless young people with high and complex needs, employment may not be the highest priority in their lives, as they deal with cycles of mental health or drug and alcohol problems. The casualisation of the workforce and the low level of youth wages mean that employment may be tenuous. Without family support, a young person can easily end up homeless again. Sustained support and stable accommodation, combined with a raft of opportunities to be prepared for employment, as well as opportunities for medium-term supported employment will be required to achieve better labour market outcomes for this group.

9. Young people who have been in state care and protection are over-represented in the homeless population. In the 2006 census of homeless school students, some 15 per cent of students had been in care and protection. In Project i, about one in five of the young people entering SAAP were estimated to have been in care and protection. An RMIT study found 42 per cent of young adults and other adults in SAAP has been in care and protection. Often these young people's family situations have deteriorated before they become teenagers. They are a particularly vulnerable group. In every hearing, the systems of care and protection in the different jurisdictions were reported as being under-resourced and under-staffed. This resulted in priority allocations that focus on younger children, creating major issues of access for older youth. In a significant number

of cases, the failure of the system is a part of the problem. The Commonwealth has had little responsibility and state care systems are in crisis. The NYC has called for a Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission inquiry into care and protection in Australia, to expose the extent of the problems and provide a basis for national action. Despite some positive effort, there is an urgent need for numerous improvements, including a universal leaving care entitlement. The total investment will be considerable but it would have a major impact on youth homelessness in the medium- to long-term future.

10. Mental health issues are more prevalent among homeless youth than the overall population of young people in Australia. In some cases, mental health is implicated in a young person becoming homeless, although it may be the case that the deterioration in the mental health of other family members tips young people into homelessness. However, becoming homeless is also an unhealthy lifestyle. There is evidence that psychological and psychiatric problems may result from homelessness. When young people with mental health issues also develop substance use problems, the situation of comorbidity (or dual diagnosis) presents major difficulties for supported accommodation services, as well as for specialist services that deal with mental health and drug and alcohol issues. Mental health is a major issue amongst chronically homeless youth with high and complex needs.

11. Drug and alcohol use by Australian young people has declined in recent years. However, many service providers report that drug and alcohol use among homeless young people has increased over twenty years. The wider availability of stimulants such as ICE has meant that the type of substances being used has shifted somewhat. The origins of drug and alcohol use are diverse: sometimes it is from a permissive family situation, as self-medication of mental health conditions, or, more commonly, as a practice acquired by contact with other young people who are homeless. There are serious consequences for homeless youth with drug and alcohol use problems, including gaining access to supported accommodation or remaining in accommodation. SAAP agencies reported difficulty obtaining timely specialist help for their clients. Continued drug use can further harm some already worsening yet important relationships in young people's lives and lead to petty crime that ultimately involves them with police and the criminal justice system.

12. Indigenous young people are more likely to experience homelessness than non-Indigenous youth. Although in many ways the drivers of homelessness are similar, there are some significant differences. Indigenous Australians have been described as suffering 'spiritual homelessness' which stems from dispossession and forced removal from homelands and family. A major cultural difference with the mainstream of the community and other groups is the extended family network and the obligations that belonging to such a kinship network implies. Overcrowding is common, leading to stressful conflicts. There is an increased transience as a result of moving from more remote locations to urban centres and to visit extended family members. Also, the rate of

early school leaving has an impact on drug and alcohol abuse-fuelled violence on young people, which is a driver of Indigenous youth homelessness. Indigenous young people are over represented in the justice system; they have difficulty accessing appropriate services. Their health outcomes are poor and they experience educational and employment disadvantage. The NYC calls for explicit attention to the needs of young people in all national initiatives directed to Indigenous communities. Indigenous youth workers and 'boarding school' settings connected to Indigenous communities are two practical measures for consideration.

13. Schools and the education system have become important sites for early intervention to assist homeless and at-risk students. Community agencies work more closely with schools than they ever did in the early nineties in the aftermath of the HREOC report. School welfare staff have become an important part of the early intervention response. However, school welfare resources and the school welfare staff available are unevenly distributed across Australia and the NYC seeks to establish appropriate national standards. There are still problems of school exclusion when schools are confronted by young people displaying 'challenging behaviours' due to family problems. Where family reconciliation and mediation is undertaken, good results are possible in many cases - but not all. Reconnect is a highly successful early intervention program but not all communities have a Reconnect service and only about one third of students deemed to be most at risk, are currently being reached. Students who become homeless receive more help than in the past but remain very vulnerable to not completing school. Alternative education settings should be made available as important options for some students.

14. A major component of Australia's homelessness service system will continue to be supported accommodation for homeless young people. The demand for supported accommodation is excessive; about one in every two young people who seek accommodation on a night are turned away. Only some 14 per cent of the homeless population can be accommodated in SAAP on any night. The transition out of homelessness to independent living has been restricted due to long wait times for public housing and steeply rising rents. Teenagers may not be ready to take on full responsibility for living independently. Many services believe that supported accommodation has lost a major degree of flexibility to meet the varied needs of young clients. For over a decade SAAP funding has been increased at less than the real rise in the costs of providing support services for homeless people. Every Australian community should have the capacity to provide supported accommodation and associated services for homeless young people.

15. After leaving home, young people often return home at different times before re-entering private rental accommodation. This is normal, but for a young person without that option, a breakdown in their housing situation may well lead to homelessness. Returning home may be possible for teenagers following mediation or family reconciliation, but it is not always the most likely nor the most desirable outcome. During the hearings and in submissions, issues were raised about transitional accommodation. Some young

people are not ready for such independent living. Access to fully independent rental accommodation is difficult and the level of support that many young people need is not available. SAAP agencies are not resourced to provide extensive post-SAAP support, although workers know how important this can be. The idea of post-SAAP outreach support being made available to all homeless young people moving into independent accommodation is potentially a way of improving SAAP outcomes by assisting young people to avoid another crisis and to prevent recycling back into the homelessness service system.

16. Over the past 20 years the affordability of housing has deteriorated – decreasing by 140 per cent between 1986 and 2006. In 1986, 3.6 years of average income was needed to purchase a home; by 2006 the purchase price required 7.0 years' pay. The total stock of public housing has declined and rental vacancies have reached an all-time low. Extensive media coverage in 2007 highlighted 'a crisis of affordable housing' and the issue was prominent in the 2007 Federal election. There is a strong case for a new national agreement on affordable housing that is broader than the current Commonwealth-States Housing Agreement, and the needs of young people should be explicitly addressed under any new agreement. There needs to be a real net increase in the investment in public and community housing; and in the short-term, the NYC has argued for education, training and employment linked housing in the form of Foyers and other similar models.

17. There is a clear link between homelessness and a series of health issues. Mental health issues and drug and alcohol addictions and substance abuse are experienced by a significant group of young people in the homeless population, and often co-occur. Family breakdown is often accompanied by trauma, grief and a disturbed emotional state. Being homeless involves a lifestyle with many health risks. Youth-specific health services, many designed under the Innovative Health Services for Homeless Young People (IHSHY) program, have been demonstrably successful. The gaps in drug and alcohol and mental health services for young people particularly affect homeless youth, where obtaining stable accommodation is necessary for progress in any longer-term health treatments. Current systems have difficulty in handling young people with high and complex needs and co-morbidity. Regional, rural and remote health care problems are due to sparse populations, large distances and the higher costs of providing services. The NYC recommends that the successes of the IHSHY be extended more broadly to achieve a rational national deployment of services tailored to the needs of homeless young people.

18. The perception of street-frequenting homeless youth as a threat is a misconception derived from their visibility and their sometimes loud and boisterous behaviour in public spaces. Homeless young people are often the victims of crime rather than the perpetrators. But trapped in chronic homelessness and without stable accommodation for long periods of time, these young people end up engaging in petty crime – public transport fare evasion, offensive language, failure to obey a police order to move on, shop-lifting etc – to survive. The penalties levelled at homeless young for transport fare

evasion create conflict and make a homeless young people's situation even worse. The relationship between homeless youth and police, was uneven. In some places it was a source of conflict and antagonism, while in other places there have been programs to improve policing on the streets. However, the situation for homeless young people is ripe for escalation and conflict. Street youth, in particular, face greater discrimination from landlords and other businesses because of the way they present and the stigma of being homeless. If homelessness continues, then the chances of legal complications increase, raising a concern about the inadequate support for young people in these situations.

19. Homeless young people are entirely dependent on Government income support. The Youth Allowance is designed to support full-time students and unemployed young people. The 'unreasonable to live at home' criteria provides additional support for homeless young people. The bureaucratic requirements of identification and evidence present barriers for homeless young people, demonstrated by the number of young people who enter SAAP services with no income support in place. For young people under the age of 15, the youth protocol sets down who is responsible for the younger homeless. But in practice many 12-15 year olds do not receive priority attention from their state or territory care and protection services and duly turn up in SAAP services. The level of income support available to homeless young people is insufficient for the costs of living independently: this needs review, as does inadequate rental assistance in a market where rents are rising steeply. The administration of benefits using 'breaching' causes many consequential problems. Compliance for homeless and at-risk young people should be approached differently.

20. Unemployment has decreased to the lowest level for decades and the Australian economy is experiencing difficulty getting enough skilled workers in some sectors. However, homeless young people have difficulty accessing the labour market even when there are semi-skilled jobs for which they might qualify. Evidence was provided that Job Network generally does not service the needs of highly disadvantaged young people appropriately and that Work for the Dole is a poorly conceived work experience model. The JPET program was discussed as having positive aspects but changes from one department to another and the refocusing on employment outcomes has degraded JPET's value for homeless young people. An under-estimation of the issues that many homeless young people face and the effort required to overcome them underpins much of the poor policy in this area. Major reform is needed to link education, training and employment program with accommodation and other supports.

21. There is no agreed common national approach for ensuring that communities have sufficient capacity to respond to homelessness and related issues. Different programs and departments use different geographical boundaries and community agencies often complain that combined funding is positive but encumbered with onerous financial accountability requirements to the different departments that dispense funds. The idea

of 'communities of services' implies active community building with some resources devoted to facilitating better coordination of local systems. Informal youth networks exist in places, and some of them have survived without funding for many years. The Victorian School Focused Youth Service and the Queensland Youth Support Coordinators program have invested resources to build cooperative networks on the ground. The NYC, reiterating the stance taken in previous reports on the issue of community coordination, suggests that the best means of building cross-sectoral communities of services be investigated and trialled so a broader national initiative can be developed in the future.

22. Cost-benefit and cost-effectiveness information about youth homelessness is limited in Australia. Pinkney and Ewing (1998) estimated that the long-term economic cost to the community, of not assisting the estimated 25,000 students who experience homelessness in a year would be 'in excess of half a billion dollars per year'. The largest part of this estimated amount is the cost of educational disadvantage, supplemented by the costs to the community of ill-health and involvement in the criminal justice system. Pinkney and Ewing estimated a cost-benefit break-even point where only one in five young people are successfully helped to avoid long-term homelessness. Using the same methodology, but considering the 50,000 children who pass through SAAP services each year, the long-term cost to Australia of not successfully assisting young people to avoid homelessness might be closer to \$1 billion per year. The average cost of prevention and early intervention for families and children was \$3,079 per family, compared to the \$3,130 unit cost for SAAP, which, if capital and maintenance of housing costs are included, could be as high as \$8,500. On the existing evidence, actual budget costs to government of redressing homelessness are considerably less than the long-term cost to the community of not doing so. Providing prevention and early intervention measures for young people or families is cheaper than the assistance required once they have become homeless.

23. At the time of the NYC Inquiry, there was research evidence that youth homelessness had decreased somewhat from 2001 to 2006 due to early intervention. However, in 2006 and 2007 the affordability of housing became a major issue as private rents rose steeply and vacancy rates reached record lows. The NYC Inquiry in 2007-08 took place at a watershed point. Homelessness has been highlighted by the new Federal Government as a priority issue for action under the policy mantra of 'social inclusion'. The NYC believes that if the right policy settings are put in place and Australia makes a sustained investment in a continuum of measures from prevention, to early intervention, crisis intervention and then post-vention reconnection to community, it is possible to change the face of 'youth homelessness' in this country. The NYC urges a constructivist approach: we need an appropriately robust and sufficiently bipartisan structure and process, equal to the tasks we will need to tackle over the long-term. The NYC proposes a ROADMAP of 10 essential strategic actions: a national framework and a national plan of action; a refocus on building 'communities

of services' in actual communities across Australia; increased affordable housing for young people; an expanded Reconnect early intervention response for at-risk young people; prevention of homelessness for families and children; a national reform agenda for care and protection; supported accommodation in communities; new models and funded cooperative links between specialist health, drug and alcohol and employment services; a new foyer-like form of youth housing and, finally, post-vention support for young people who are re-establishing their lives in the community.

NYC Recommendations

The recommendations in this report are located in sections where the salient information and argument is presented. Most recommendations are in Chapters 12 to 23 under the section that deals with responses to youth homelessness and the last section that discusses broader systems issues. The exceptions are Chapter 6 Families and Chapter 9 Care and Protection, where a number of recommendations are presented on what needs to be done in these areas.

FAMILY

Recommendation 6.1

The NYC Inquiry recommends that the Commonwealth Government progressively expand the HOME Advice program as a preventive response for families at-risk of becoming homeless to at least \$60 million per year.

Recommendation 6.2

The NYC Inquiry recommends that the needs of young families who are homeless be addressed within the youth homelessness service system by providing services designed to support this group and/or specialist support workers who can work with pregnant mothers, young families with young children and children.

CARE AND PROTECTION

Recommendation 9.1

The NYC Inquiry recommends that the Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission [HREOC] consider a national inquiry into care and protection. The Inquiry should:

- review policy and practice on care and protection from a human rights perspective;
- consider new Federal-state cooperative programs and initiatives, especially early intervention and prevention in terms of family and community support;
- advise on what reforms, structures and processes are required;
- provide advice on how change might best be implemented and the scale of reforms and resources needed.

Recommendation 9.2

The NYC Inquiry recommends that the Federal Government become a partner with the states and territories in reforming Australia's care and protection sector.

Recommendation 9.3

The NYC Inquiry recommends needs-based support for all young people leaving care. Since not all issues are present at the point of leaving statutory care, support should be accessible on a flexible basis at any time up to 24 years of age and under exceptional circumstances outside that age range.

Recommendation 9.4

The NYC Inquiry recommends that all jurisdictions identify and fund models of exemplary practice to significantly improve the capacity of the care and protection system to meet the complex needs of young people in the areas of accommodation, education and mental health.

Recommendation 9.5

The NYC Inquiry recommends that all jurisdictions urgently review the level of funding provided to their care and protection programs, and develop a remedial strategy for addressing the selection, training and support of staff as well as the real need for care and protection services in the community.

Recommendation 9.6:

The NYC Inquiry recommends that community placement models, including support to families supporting 'couch-surfers', be nationally implemented, following a review of existing initiatives.

Recommendation 9.7:

The NYC Inquiry recommends that all jurisdictions support the development of a comprehensive national data collection for young people passing through care and protection, including foster care in Australia.

Recommendation 9.8:

The NYC Inquiry recommends that a national project be undertaken to develop a comprehensive suite of care and protection indicators, which would be publicly reported so that system and program performance can be adequately monitored.

INDIGENOUS YOUTH HOMELESSNESS

Recommendation 12.1:

The NYC Inquiry recommends that Indigenous young peoples' needs and issues be an explicit component in all national responses for improving the social and economic conditions of Indigenous communities.

Recommendation 12.2:

The NYC Inquiry recommends that the Federal Government fund Indigenous youth workers in Indigenous communities, especially in rural and remote Australia. Funding should cover access to training and education that leads to a youth work certificate or diploma, networking and professional supervision, as well as opportunities for ongoing skills development.

Recommendation 12.3:

The NYC Inquiry recommends that the Federal government develop 'boarding school' options for Indigenous young people, located near to Indigenous communities, where this is supported and sought by the community.

Recommendation 12.4

The NYC Inquiry recommends that Australian governments commit to effective consultation with Indigenous communities to determine whether services delivered into a region can be managed locally or require collaboration with an external service provider. If the second option for a service for at-risk young people and their families is chosen, a strategy for local community capacity building should be specifically part of the service model.

EARLY INTERVENTION

Recommendation 13.1:

The NYC Inquiry recommends that the Reconnect program be progressively expanded to optimally three times present capacity to provide full national coverage for at-risk young people and their families.

Recommendation 13.2

The NYC Inquiry recommends that the Australian Government together with the states and territories conduct a national review of the provision of student welfare services in both primary and secondary schools. The review should:

- provide a detailed audit report on the extent of student support at school level and across schools;
- identify schools on a hierarchy of need and risk;
- examine the issue of qualifications and experience for student welfare staff;
- compare student support across states and territories;
- propose national standards for student welfare services in schools.

Recommendation 13.3:

The NYC Inquiry recommends that Australian government-funded public and private secondary schools be required under a policy guideline agreed by all departments of education to participate in initiatives for the community coordination of youth services.

Recommendation 13.4:

The NYC Inquiry recommends that all jurisdictions develop clear student well-being policies, form a dedicated central leadership team on student well-being matters, issue explicit operational requirements for school principals and councils, including reporting on school leaving and social issues for departmental monitoring as well as accountability to the community.

Recommendation 13.5:

The NYC Inquiry recommends that the Australian Government commissions a national at-risk assessment of students in primary and secondary schools and develops a tool and a mechanism that will allow the benchmark data to be updated regularly if not annually.

Recommendation 13.6

The NYC Inquiry recommends that the Federal, state and territory governments develop a data collection on social indicators for schools, such as:

- the number of young people who fail to progress from primary school into secondary school;
- information on school suspensions and exclusions, both formal and informal;
- the number of young people leaving schools before completing Year 12;
- the reasons why young people leave school;
- demographic information about early school leavers.

Recommendation 13.7:

The NYC Inquiry recommends that the Australian Government undertakes a project to assess the needs of schools based on actual student and family level data and real-time monitoring rather than ABS area data based on the location of a school, which often underestimates the need of students in particular schools.

Recommendation 13.8:

The NYC Inquiry recommends that the issue of transition from primary to secondary school for Indigenous students and early school leaving be addressed as a specific strategy by state and territory governments, with additional support and funding from the Australian Government.

SUPPORTED ACCOMMODATION

Recommendation 14.1:

The NYC Inquiry recommends the needs of homeless young people be documented at the community level, where a community is taken to broadly correspond with Local Government Areas (or clusters of smaller LGAs) boundaries, using ABS homelessness data, SAAP client data, and consultations with local stakeholders to draw on local knowledge.

Recommendation 14.2

The NYC Inquiry recommends that the Commonwealth and state and territory governments expand supported accommodation, using an agreed geographical template, to ensure that every community has sufficient resources to adequately respond to homelessness and the needs of young people who become homeless.

Recommendation 14.3:

The NYC Inquiry recommends that the next review or evaluation of SAAP be required as part of its brief to examine the profile of community capacity for supported accommodation in all jurisdictions and report on the community level gaps between client need and program capacity.

Recommendation 14.4:

The NYC Inquiry recommends increased funding for supported accommodation to address the gaps between client need and service provision capacity.

Recommendation 14.5:

The NYC Inquiry recommends that funding for supported accommodation services include adequate provision for indexation in order that direct service provision capacity is maintained.

Recommendation 14.6:

The NYC Inquiry recommends that the funding and resources provided for supported accommodation be increased in line with salary levels equitable with other comparable human service positions, as well as being able to address working conditions, occupational health and safety, staff training and professional development, in order to ensure the homelessness service system's stability and viability over the long-term.

Recommendation 14.7:

The NYC Inquiry recommends that the importance of capital funding for properties be recognised and that capital funding for homelessness services be increased to ensure an adequate level of properties for crisis, medium- and long-term accommodation.

Recommendation 14.8

The NYC Inquiry recommends that appropriate responses and strategies for high and complex needs clients be developed and resourced, that provide lower staff-client ratios, and funds to buy in specialist support, as well as funding for new joined up models that enable access to health, drug and alcohol, mental health, education, training and employment services.

Recommendation 14.9:

The NYC Inquiry recommends that more training on mental health, drug and alcohol and suicide prevention be available to generalist workers in supported accommodation.

Recommendation 14.10

The NYC Inquiry recommends that working with at-risk and homeless Indigenous young people be adopted as a priority within a National Homelessness Action Plan.

POST-SAAP TRANSITION

Recommendation 15.1:

The NYC Inquiry recommends that state and territory housing authorities together with the Australian Government fund a progressive increase in public and community housing stock suitable for young people.

Recommendation 15.2

The NYC Inquiry recommends that state and territory housing authorities together with the Australian Government develop and fund initiatives for new models of youth housing that combine education, training and employment with a package of accommodation and support. These might include approaches such as the Foyer model, or accommodation closely linked with schools and other education and training programs, as an urgent short-term supply side youth housing contribution.

Recommendation 15.3:

The NYC Inquiry recommends that one third of the \$150 million for housing for the homeless, promised by the Labor Party in the 2007 Federal election campaign, be allocated by the Federal Government to housing for homeless youth.

Recommendation 15.4:

The NYC Inquiry recommends that all SAAP youth services be funded for an outreach support worker specifically designated to provide needs-based support to former clients who have moved to independent accommodation.

Recommendation 15.5:

The NYC Inquiry recommends that family mediation or counselling for all homeless young people in supported accommodation be considered for national implementation, with an allocation of brokerage funds according to specific individual client needs.

Recommendation 15.6:

The NYC Inquiry recommends that the amount of medium and long-term housing stock be expanded across Australia with an appropriate balance between crisis and medium-, long-term, and transitional accommodation.

Recommendation 15.7

The NYC Inquiry recommends that all jurisdictions review the provision of support for young people moving beyond crisis services into SAAP medium and long-term accommodation.

HOUSING

Recommendation 16.1:

The NYC Inquiry recommends that the Australian Government undertake a wide-ranging review of the social and economic policy settings that have contributed to the housing affordability crisis. The review should suggest a long-term strategic approach to growing the public, community and private housing sectors with projections of the extent of public investment required over at least the next 10 years to ensure sustainable housing affordability.

Recommendation 16.2:

The NYC Inquiry recommends that the current Commonwealth-States Housing Agreement be replaced by a National Affordable Housing Agreement which includes public housing but also deals with broader issues of affordability in terms of public-private community housing and the development of private rental housing for low income individuals and families.

Recommendation 16.3:

The NYC Inquiry recommends that the Australian Government consider tax incentives for private investment in affordable housing projects for low-income individuals and families.

Recommendation 16.4:

The NYC Inquiry recommends that the Australian Government urgently develop a significant new stock of affordable housing for young people based on an Australian version of the Foyer Model as well as exploring other education, training and employment related housing models as a significant component of long-term housing provision for young people.

RECOMMENDATION 16.5:

The NYC inquiry recommends that additional funds be provided to enable the states and territories to acquire and build additional public housing stock for young people.

RECOMMENDATION 16.6:

The NYC Inquiry recommends that the Crisis Accommodation Program guidelines be extended to allow for the urgent provision of medium and long-term supported accommodation for young people and that funding levels be significantly increased to meet these new objectives.

RECOMMENDATION 16.7:

The NYC Inquiry recommends that the Australian Government and state and territory jurisdictions consider how local government could be more involved in the development of affordable housing through the implementation of appropriate local planning policies. Additional funds will need to be allocated to facilitate the development of capacity in local government.

RECOMMENDATION 16.8:

The NYC Inquiry recommends that Commonwealth Rental Assistance be continued but reviewed with a view to considering adjustments that take account of regional differences in private rental markets.

HEALTH**Recommendation 17.1:**

The NYC Inquiry recommends that the Innovative Health Services for Homeless Youth (IHSY) program be continued and further developed as an important component of a national homelessness service system in order to provide more and better health services for at-risk, disadvantaged and homeless young Australians.

Recommendation 17.2:

The NYC Inquiry recommends that flexible, non-judgemental ante-natal and post-natal outreach based support services be implemented in major population centres for pregnant and parenting young women.

Recommendation 17.3:

The NYC Inquiry recommends that a national network of youth substance abuse services be established across all jurisdictions to provide an appropriate range of services that are sufficiently funded to meet current levels of need.

Recommendation 17.4:

The NYC Inquiry recommends that all jurisdictions review the provision of mental health services for young people in terms of access, service gaps, wait times and operational efficiency in order to adequately resource support programs for young people with mental health issues and their families.

Recommendation 17.5:

The NYC Inquiry recommends that new models of residential programs be developed and funded which enable drug and alcohol, youth mental health and supported accommodation services to work in partnership to support homeless young people with a dual diagnosis.

CRIME AND JUSTICE**Recommendation 18.1:**

The NYC Inquiry recommends that state and territory jurisdictions convene a review of the various laws that apply to behaviour in public space and how these laws affect young people, especially homeless young people.

Recommendation 18.2

The NYC Inquiry recommends that youth and police community liaison committees be given a role to monitor issues between young people in public spaces and police and how policing practices impact on young people.

Recommendation 18.3:

The NYC Inquiry recommends that state and territory jurisdictions extend diversionary practices that prevent homeless young people being placed on remand in custody because they cannot afford bail.

Recommendation 18.4:

The NYC Inquiry recommends that state and territory jurisdictions give particular attention to diversionary practices to prevent Indigenous young people being placed on remand in custody.

Recommendation 18.5:

The NYC Inquiry recommends that Centrelink issue a means tested 'youth card', which would carry certain entitlements such as free or concession fares on public transport, as a way of reducing fines and punitive outcomes.

Recommendation 18.6:

The NYC Inquiry recommends that stronger post-release programs be put in place for young people leaving juvenile justice or adult correctional facilities to prevent an offender becoming homeless after release. Such programs should involve:

- Case management support;
- Brokerage funds;
- Accommodation;
- Follow-up for at least 12 months;
- A client data collection system so that the effectiveness of these measures can be monitored.

INCOME

Recommendation 19.1:

The NYC Inquiry recommends that the total benefit for a young person who is homeless be equivalent to the adult Newstart allowance.

Recommendation 19.2:

The NYC Inquiry recommends that more weight be accorded to the professional assessment of service providers as to whether a young person is eligible for the 'unable to live at home' level of benefit.

Recommendation 19.3

The NYC Inquiry recommends that the emergency special benefit be payable to young people under the age of 15 years and their carers until an appropriate determination of child protection issues and placement can be achieved.

Recommendation 19.4:

The NYC Inquiry recommends that the Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations (DEEWR) 'participation compliance' policy be reviewed to ensure more appropriate responses to the income support needs of homeless young people.

Recommendation 19.5:

The NYC Inquiry recommends that financial circumstances and homelessness be considered relevant factors in discretionary decisions about any sanctions applying to the administration of Centrelink benefits.

Recommendations 19.6

The NYC Inquiry recommends that national policy on youth homelessness establishes a different balance between rent assistance, supported accommodation and public and community housing to effect a lower reliance on rental assistance and greater access to affordable public and community housing stock.

Recommendation 19.7

The NYC Inquiry recommends that a review of the level of rental assistance available to homeless young people be undertaken, with consideration given to a higher level of payment adjusted to state and regional rental variations.

EMPLOYMENT

Recommendation 20.1:

The NYC Inquiry recommends that foundation education, job preparation, training and job creation be embedded as part of the coordinated response to youth homelessness.

Recommendation 20.2:

The NYC Inquiry recommends the Jobs Placement, Education and Training Program [JPET] be refocused as a pre-employment program to help homeless young people overcome the social barriers to their participation in education, training or employment, and expanded to more adequately reach the number of homeless young people who need this kind of assistance.

Recommendation 20.3

The NYC Inquiry recommends that foundation education, job preparation, training and job creation be linked in a package to the provision of accommodation and support. This would

include youth housing such as Foyer housing, or similar models, which need to be closely linked with SAAP services.

Recommendation 20.4

The NYC Inquiry recommends that supported employment be available for up to two years for homeless or at-risk young people with high and/or complex needs. Supported employment would involve:

- a case worker available to support both the young person and his/her employer;
- appropriate employer linked subsidies;
- a capacity to liaise with employers to negotiate job placements under the supported employment program.

Recommendation 20.5

The NYC Inquiry recommends that innovation funds be made available for the development of not-for-profit businesses that employ homeless young people and provide services and products to the general community. The primary purpose of these businesses would be to provide real employment experiences for at-risk and homeless young people, who are not ready for employment in the broader labour market.

Recommendation 20.6

The NYC Inquiry recommends that the transitions of young people from school to post-school employment options be supported by a national case management program providing transition assistance on an individual needs basis.

COORDINATION

Recommendation 21.1

The NYC Inquiry recommends that the Commonwealth Government, together with the state and territory governments, develop a 'community of services' model to support community level coordination and cross-sectoral collaboration across all issues affecting young people. This would need to involve all community sector stakeholders, including schools, in a sustainable network of youth services.

Recommendation 21.2

The NYC Inquiry recommends that the Commonwealth Government in cooperation with state and territory governments undertake a community youth coordination model research and development project. The project would:

- Survey comprehensively all initiatives on coordination of youth services;
- Undertake model development workshops with agencies and schools;
- Develop a theoretical model for a sustainable 'community of services';

- Consider how recurrent cross-sectoral department funding could be applied to a national network of LGA-based 'community of services' approach;
- Advise on the budgetary implications of developmental funds and the recurrent funding that would be required to support a viable 'community of services' network at the local level.

COSTS AND BENEFITS

Recommendation 22.1

The NYC Inquiry recommends that national policy on youth homelessness address the unmet need for early intervention and prevention responses for at-risk and homeless young people.

Recommendation 22.2

The NYC Inquiry recommends that a longitudinal cost-benefit study of homeless young people be undertaken.

Recommendation 22.3

The NYC Inquiry recommends that an independent cost-effectiveness study be undertaken of the different models of early intervention for homeless young people and their families as well as supported accommodation for young people in SAAP.

SYSTEMS AND STRATEGIES

Recommendation 23.1

The NYC Inquiry recommends that the Australian Government and state and territory governments commit to developing a long-term strategy and action plan to eliminate homelessness in Australia.

Recommendation 23.2

The NYC Inquiry recommends that the Australian Government and state and territory governments create properly resourced compatible data collections across all programs, both Federal and state, that assist homeless people. At the same time, a homelessness identifier should be incorporated in other social programs.

Recommendation 23.3

The NYC Inquiry recommends that the Australian Government and state and territory governments form a National Homelessness Taskforce as a vehicle for developing a national homelessness framework as well as a national strategy and action plan.

Recommendation 23.4

The NYC Inquiry recommends that a Federal Government Social Inclusion Unit focus on developing a reform agenda for how joined-up government and joined-up policy can be undertaken in an effective and sustainable way across departments and jurisdictions to assist young people who are homeless.

Recommendation 23.5

The NYC Inquiry recommends that the public administration of all programs for homeless young people be reviewed with a view to improving program administration and cost planning for service provision.

The review should address:

- Improved accountability by developing more efficient and streamlined ways of collecting information and reporting on outcomes;
- Adequate real cost indexation to maintain service provision in the face of rising external costs;
- An exemption from the impact of efficiency dividends for programs catering for the most disadvantaged Australians;
- Service models that adequately allow for real cost structures such as occupational health and safety, training and professional development and community service salary scale increments;
- A minimum standard of three-year funding agreements.