

Submission for the new parliamentary inquiry into the principles and service standards
for new homelessness legislation

Summary:

This submission is primarily focused on making recommendations to the new homelessness legislation in regards to the guiding principles concern with homeless young people whom ought to be separately identified within the homelessness legislation.

Aim of Submission:

Recommendations for the new homelessness legislation

This submission will address ‘examination point one’ in the 18 June 2009 House of Representatives media report concerning ‘principles and standards for new homelessness legislation’.

1. The principals that should underpin the provision of services to Australians who are homeless or at risk of homelessness.

I will assert a guiding principle dealing with the issue of:

-Young people and homelessness

Which I would like to clarify as a title to cover the following areas of:

1. Youth accommodation services
2. The responsibilities of child protection services, police and the Children’s Court in regards to young people and homelessness.

Young People: a guiding principle for the new legislation on homelessness:

I believe that young people ought to specifically address within the new parliamentary inquiry and should be recommended to be a unique guiding principle of the new legislation.

I assert this to be implemented on the following grounds:

1. Young people who are affected by homelessness often become homeless in their adult life.
2. Young people can be considered one of the most vulnerable groups in any society as young people are solely dependent on adults for care.
3. Young people are undergoing developmental change which often contributes to poor decision making and explains a pre-determined issue of underdeveloped social skills.

Therefore, the new legislation ought to address issues surrounding:

1. Youth Accommodation Services:

Firstly, to clearly define; youth accommodation services is understood as being crisis, medium and long term accommodation for young people in both government and 'not for profit' organisations. Young people are defined from 0 – 17 years old.

I recommend:

1.1 Adequate youth accommodation services are available across Australia, including rural and remote areas.

1.2 Youth accommodation services ought to be secure and have a positive and intimate relationship with the police and other community services to promote effective community guardianship.

1.3 Youth accommodation services ought to be predominantly focused on providing stability to clients and building self worth and life skills.

1.4 Promote and increase new SAAP initiatives for youth accommodation services, specialising for high needs clients.

1.5 Lengthen and increase annual funding agreements for SAAP youth accommodation services to tri-annual (every three years) funding agreements.

1.6 Increase the current level of compulsory data collection for all SAAP youth accommodation services.

2. The responsibilities of child protection services, the police and the Children's Court in regards to young people and homelessness:

I recommend:

2.1. Child protection services ought not to exit young persons into crisis accommodation services or into homelessness.

2.2. Young people ought not to be bailed to crisis accommodation services from the Children's Court.

2.3. Young people ought not to be sent to youth detention centres due to a lack of accommodation options.

2.4. Young people ought not to be criminalised for being homeless.

2.5. Homeless young people ought to be accommodated by Children's Court to medium term accommodation.

2.6. Police ought to take responsibility to accommodate homeless young people, or at least refer homeless young people to child protection services to be accommodated.

2.7. Child protection services ought to take responsibility to ensure all young people who are homeless are not turned away.

2.8. No young person in Australia should be experiencing primary homelessness for an extended period of time.

Conclusion:

The primary aim of this submission was to highlight the need to separately address youth homelessness in the new homelessness legislation. This is due to the different situation youth are in which may not necessarily apply to adults. Therefore in final consideration, the issue of youth homelessness ought not to be unified with the issue of adult homelessness but be separately considered within the new homelessness legislation.

Regards