

**The Government's Response  
to the  
Report of the Homelessness Taskforce**

***'Putting People First'***

**May 2002**



## FOREWORD

The Government established the State Homelessness Taskforce in July 2001 to develop a State Homelessness Strategy.

The enormous effort by the Taskforce in quickly developing a comprehensive Strategy demonstrated to the Government how important an issue homelessness has become in our community.

The Taskforce identified the large numbers of homeless in our community and emphasised the number of children affected by this growing problem of social exclusion. It also clearly outlined the dimension of the issue and the complexities associated with assisting the homeless.

As a Government we have set a target of pursuing strong economic growth. But we are determined to ensure the less fortunate in our community are not left behind.

Social problems like homelessness cannot be ignored and Governments today have to adopt modern socially inclusive policies.

Helping the less fortunate in times of crisis can make a difference between survival and breakdown. We fail as a society if we leave the most vulnerable to fend for themselves with no care or support.

There is a common perception that homelessness is about a few people roaming the streets and sleeping on park benches. The reality is different. The Taskforce found that rough sleepers constitute only a minor proportion.

Homelessness affects thousands of people both directly and indirectly. It involves children, Indigenous people, couples, singles, the aged, refugees, migrants, the disabled, those addicted to various substances and people escaping family violence. It also compounds the problems associated with poverty and the lack of opportunity.

Consequently, the Government's response has been quick and substantial. This response addresses the key findings of the Taskforce by providing for more public housing; help to assist people through transitions in their lives and support to keep people housed.

The Government will continue its emphasis on joined-up government and the involvement of the community sector in the planning and implementation of programs to address homelessness.

Finally, I wish to extend my sincere thanks on behalf of the Government to all who have been involved, in particular, my thanks to Mr Tony Pietropiccolo the Chairman of the Taskforce.

This is another of our 'Putting People First' initiatives and is designed to continue the Government's program of building a stronger and more inclusive society. I am confident the response will make a real difference to those in need.

Dr Geoff Gallop  
PREMIER

# Introduction

As part of its commitment to the people of Western Australia, the Government has made addressing homelessness a high priority. This priority was reflected in the Government's youth policy statement and the housing policy statement at the last election.

The Homelessness Taskforce was established to capture the wealth of experience of the many service professionals and community members involved in responding to this significant social issue. The response of the Government to the Taskforce's recommendations stresses that the combined resources of the social sector, together with the continuing input of the community is essential in tackling this social issue.

The approach taken by the Government in this instance is consistent with the greater focus on a systematic look at social issues that have been inadequately addressed for some years. At the forefront of this approach is the establishment of a Standing Committee on Social Policy and the forming of the Social Policy Unit within the Department of Premier and Cabinet. The Standing Committee, which comprises Ministers for across the social policy spectrum, proposed the creation of the Homelessness Taskforce and is well placed to oversee the Government response through a combined and coordinated set of policies.

This process of seeking information, involving the community and applying a coordinated response is in keeping with a number of similar tasks being undertaken by Government. The Government recognises the importance of evidence and systematic analysis is the foundation of good policy and action.

## Overview of homelessness

The Homelessness Taskforce provided a useful framework to view the nature of the issue and a guide to the way government might address the many interlocking factors that lead to homelessness.

A person is homeless if he or she has inadequate access to safe and secure housing and is one extreme of a spectrum of disadvantage. Inadequate housing has been shown to:

- Damage, or is likely to damage, individual health;
- Threaten individual safety; and/or
- Severely restrict access to the essential personal amenities and the economic and social support that a home normally affords.

The Taskforce defined three broad categories of homelessness.

### *Primary homelessness or sleeping rough*

People without conventional accommodation, such as people living on the streets, in parks, squatting in vacant buildings or using cars or makeshift dwellings.

### *Secondary homelessness or stop gap accommodation*

People who move frequently from one form of transitional shelter to another. This group includes: people using emergency accommodation, such as hostels for the homeless, or night shelters; young people staying in youth refuges; women and children escaping relationship and family violence, staying in women's refuges or alternative supported accommodation options; families residing in externally supported accommodation options; and people residing temporarily with other families, acquaintances and friends because they have no accommodation of their own.

### *Tertiary homelessness or insecure tenure/marginally housed*

People whose living arrangements do not provide them with security of tenure as provided by a lease, or who are living in accommodation that is unsafe or harmful to their health. Such accommodation might include some boarding houses, caravan parks, rooming houses or special accommodation houses. It is also recognised that some people actively make a lifestyle choice to reside in boarding houses, rooming houses and caravan parks and should not be considered as either homeless or marginally housed. The concern in this situation is when there are no other options and there is insecurity of tenure. Women, children, young people and seniors living in situations of family violence also fit into this category.

### **Numbers of homeless**

No reliable count of the number of homeless people exists for the whole of Australia or for any of the individual States or Territories. However, it is possible to gain a rough estimate of the number of people who are in crisis and supported accommodation and other stopgap options.

Analysis of the 1996 Census by Chamberlain and McKenzie produced an estimate of 12,252 homeless people in Western Australia. A one-night census of Supported Accommodation Assistance Program services undertaken last year established that there were 1273 people accommodated throughout the State. Of these, 497 (39%) were accompanying children, 111 (9%) were unaccompanied young people under 18 years of age and 665 (52%) were adults over 18 years.

To better understand these estimates the State in partnership with other State and Territory Governments is providing funding for Chamberlain and McKenzie to carry out further analysis of the 2001 Census.

### **Homelessness vulnerability**

People who are homeless have typically experienced difficulties in their lives and often homelessness arises because of these difficulties including:

- Family conflict;
- Mental illness;
- Interruptions to stability through imprisonment, long term care or institutional living;
- Family violence;
- Problematic alcohol and other drug use;
- Managing on limited incomes where debt management can be problematic; and
- Cognitive difficulties, such as managing with acquired brain injury and other disabilities rendering consistent decision-making difficult.

### **Policy response to the issues surrounding Homelessness**

These issues must be well understood to develop effective responses to complex social issues. The Government will address this range of issues and has already begun to make progress with strategies such as those arising from the Community Drug Summit, reforms in sentencing options and strategies for addressing family violence.

This approach represents a significant turning point in the Government's response to homelessness. For the first time, the combined resources of the community sector are to be drawn into a concerted and holistic response.

The Government is committed to changing the structure of Government to rebuild and maintain a strong public sector that is effective, efficient and strategically focussed on the implementation of

cohesive and integrated Government policy. In particular, the 'Delivering a Better Government' policy highlighted the need to:

- Facilitate a whole of Government approach to addressing community problems through greater coordination and integration of service delivery;
- Ensure the effective use of taxpayer's money to deliver benefits to all Western Australians; and
- Reduce the duplication of policy advice.

The recommendations of the Homelessness Taskforce support these goals, and stress that the community expects more than a 'siloed' response from Government.

The Government supports the directions articulated in the State Homelessness Taskforce Report Action Plan. The commitment by Government is to work collaboratively with the community and across portfolio areas to respond to the needs of people.

### **The Homelessness Taskforce**

In July 2001, the Government appointed a Taskforce to develop a State Homelessness Strategy. Taskforce members were appointed on the basis of their individual expertise and commitment to people who are homeless, and as representatives of the broader community. Membership included regional, metropolitan, Government, non-Government and Aboriginal representation.

The Taskforce was asked to develop a plan of action, for practical, across-Government and community strategies to:

- Prevent homelessness;
- Provide effective support for those who are homeless; and
- Provide support for people attempting to maintain their accommodation after an incidence of homelessness.

The Taskforce made a total of 68 recommendations across three key policy priorities and 13 strategic areas. These are:

- State Housing Strategy to include the development and retention of affordable housing;
- Increased Commonwealth and State Government funding for social housing;
- Broaden opportunities for increasing the amount, durability and type of affordable housing;
- Optimise the access and use of existing housing for people on low incomes;
- Addressing income support issues;
- Support and advocacy to prevent homelessness;
- Leaving institutional and long term care;
- Long term accommodation with support;
- Support for people who are homeless;
- Establish an implementation committee;
- Legislation;
- Community education; and
- Working together.

The Taskforce submitted its report to Government on 31 January 2002.

### **The Government's response**

The Government will act to ensure the implementation of the broad range of initiatives arising from the State Homelessness Taskforce report.

Ensuring a supply of affordable housing, and by ensuring adequate, targeted and flexible support services to meet peoples needs can reduce homelessness in Western Australia.

The prevailing issues that are influencing the Government's response to the Taskforce's recommendations are:

- The accommodation needs of people with mental illness, particularly young people;
- The numbers of children who are homeless because of their family situation;
- Assisting people exiting the justice system;
- The needs of young people leaving care to live independently;
- Addressing high levels of people in crisis accommodation; and
- Tackling endemic problems with Aboriginal housing.

The Government response reflects the thrust of the Taskforce recommendations to include:

- Preventative and early intervention services designed to minimise homelessness risk and maximise people's opportunities through early assistance to prevent crises;
- Joining up Government programs to present a seamless set of services for people;
- Involving the community in the planning, design and implementation of responses;
- Being supportive and compassionate in assisting people who are homeless; and
- Monitoring the implementation of these initiatives through the development of performance measures.

Consequently the three themes of the Government's response to the Taskforce's recommendations will be:

- **Better options for housing** - Improve access to affordable housing;
- **Vulnerability and transition** - Assist people through important transitions from institutions and other situations; and
- **Stability in housing** - Provide services to keep people housed.

This response is intrinsically linked to other social issues, in particular poverty. The strong link between poverty and stable housing is well understood by the Government and consequently the work of the Taskforce will serve to assist Government in the development of a comprehensive State Housing Strategy.

The Government will assess progress over this broader agenda and will ensure the appropriate evaluation of the response.

The Government has approached the three themes in the following manner:

#### *1. Better options for housing*

The Government is committed to finding ways to boost the amount of social housing. As a first step the Government is developing a sustainable State Housing Strategy. The Strategy will establish the policy, legislative and funding changes necessary to deliver affordable, appropriate and sustainable housing for all Western Australians.

The issues identified by the State Homelessness Taskforce relating to increasing the supply of appropriate affordable housing will be addressed as a key component in this strategy.

In the meantime Government is working with the Department of Housing and Works and the community sector to maximise the production of housing from available funds.

Seeking a better deal from the Commonwealth through the Commonwealth State Housing Agreement is also a high priority for the State Government. Maximum effort will be given to ensuring that the Commonwealth meets its responsibilities in the area of public housing.

## 2. *Vulnerability and Transition*

'Prevention is better than cure', and similarly preventing homelessness through early intervention will form a key policy direction of Government.

The Government supports the Taskforce focus on preventing people from becoming homeless by seeking to intervene at the point where someone is at risk. The State is committed to enhancing the range of services that assist people in making transitions in their lives. These transitions can render some people vulnerable to homelessness and other disadvantage. The Taskforce has identified a number of critical periods where such intervention is essential, including:

- Transition from long-term care, prison, hospital or detention into the community. Government and Government funded agencies are often involved with people before these transitions occur and the Government is committed to assisting people through these transitional experiences. A focus must be on minimising the risk of homelessness at these critical junctures.
- Moving through the rental market. The Government is currently undertaking a review of the Residential Tenancies Act, and accordingly will remain mindful of the Taskforce recommendations. The Government is also committed to investigating legislative options to ensure the legal protection of vulnerable people and will examine the legislation from other jurisdictions in Australia and overseas.
- Support for the homeless. The Government will continue existing support, and facilitate improvements to people who are homeless. Within this group there are a significant number of children who accompany their parents through homelessness. In keeping with the Government's focus on seeking to intervene to provide early support and assistance to children and their families to increase the opportunities for those children, the Government places a high priority on these initiatives.

## 3. *Stability in Housing*

The Government has supported several recommendations of the Taskforce that seek to improve support and continuing assistance for those who have suitable accommodation but are threatened with homelessness. Financial counselling services and debt management advice will be extended to increase the chances of retaining existing homes.

### **Implementation**

This response articulates a delineation of roles and responsibilities across the broad social sector to ensure comprehensive and across-Government action.

The Taskforce process has commenced a commitment to cross-sectorial partnership and consultation in forming an effective response. However, this commitment does not cease with the report of the Taskforce. The Government will establish a Committee comprising community and Government representatives to monitor the progress of implementation. This Committee will meet at six monthly intervals and report on progress to the Cabinet Standing Committee on Social Policy.

The monitoring Committee will also be responsible for assisting the Standing Committee to develop indicators to measure the Government's performance in responding to the Taskforce's recommendations.

In implementing the range of initiatives arising from the State Homelessness Taskforce Report, Government Departments will work in partnership with the community sector to provide advice on policy and prioritise actions.

The whole response will be evaluated, commencing in July 2003 with a report to Government by 31 December 2003.

### **An investment in people to address homelessness**

Since the Taskforce commenced in July 2001, the Government has committed around \$20 million over four years to address homelessness issues. This has included:

- \$1.2 million per year to increase bond assistance provided by the Department of Housing and Works
- \$4 million over four years to boost *the Community Living for People with Psychiatric Disability – Living in the Community* program
- \$2.6 million in 2001/02 and \$3.125 million in 2002/03 to increase accommodation services for people with disabilities
- \$2 million over four years to increase supported accommodation services for young people
- \$100 000 pilot project with the Real Estate Institute of WA to assist Aboriginal families in private sector accommodation
- \$150 000 through the *Family Strength* initiative to develop practical in-home support services to assist people to manage in the home
- \$150 000 through the WA Drug and Alcohol Office to supported accommodation services for young people with alcohol and drug problems
- \$270 000 to establish and operate the Homeless Helpline
- \$90 000 to expand the Street Doctor program.

In addition to these substantial efforts the Government has approved a range of new initiatives. Starting this year and over the next four years (2001/02 to 2005/06) the Government will:

- Immediately boost public housing through an injection of \$10.5 million
- \$7 million to assist public and private sector tenants to keep their housing
- \$3.84 million to provide services and accommodation for people with mental illness
- \$3.48 million to help homeless children
- \$2.5 million for non-government organisations to provide financial counselling services
- \$2.4 million to help young people leaving long-term care
- \$1.36 million to support people exiting the justice system
- \$1 million to assist people directly into stable accommodation by by-passing crisis accommodation.

### **Conclusion**

The Taskforce has fulfilled its stated purpose in capturing the wealth of experience, knowledge and wisdom of the community to contribute to the formulation of long-term strategic policies to address the issue of homelessness in Western Australia. The Government's response has remained true to the recommendations, and provides an exciting new direction in our collective response to homelessness over the coming years.

# Response's to the Homelessness Taskforce Recommendations

## 1. ACCESS TO APPROPRIATE AND AFFORDABLE ACCOMMODATION

### 1.1 STATE HOUSING STRATEGY TO INCLUDE THE DEVELOPMENT AND RETENTION OF AFFORDABLE HOUSING

#### *Taskforce Recommendations:*

**1.1.1 *Ensure the State Housing Strategy includes proposals for increasing the supply of affordable housing***

**1.1.2 *Ensure the State Housing Strategy includes a continuum of housing types in all locations to promote community sustainability.***

#### **Government Response:**

The Government supports these recommendations.

The Government is developing a State Housing Strategy. The draft strategy, *Housing Strategy WA*, will be put out to community consultation by October 2002. The Strategy will establish the policy, legislative and funding changes necessary to deliver affordable, appropriate and sustainable housing in Western Australia in the medium to long-term.

The recognition given by the Taskforce to the need for a greater supply of affordable housing to meet the housing needs of households on low incomes is welcomed by the Government. The housing needs of groups identified by the Taskforce as being especially at risk of becoming homeless, including Indigenous people, people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds, young people and people with disabilities, will be given a high priority in *Housing Strategy WA*.

The Strategy will also address the housing needs of Western Australians living in rural and remote areas of the State, particularly for Indigenous people where homelessness translates into severe overcrowding.

The Strategy will be finalised in the next 12 months and will support the Government's State Sustainability Strategy by encouraging the construction of housing that uses sustainability principles. The Western Australian Council of Social Service's project on *Housing and Sustainable Communities Indicators* will also be a useful input to *Housing Strategy WA* in suggesting ways of promoting sustainable communities. The Government's New Living program will continue in metropolitan and country areas, providing benefits of increased housing and tenure diversity in the developed areas.

**1.1.3 *On State owned land sold for redevelopment for housing a minimum of 10% to be allocated to either increase additional affordable housing on the existing site or set aside for affordable housing in alternative locations.***

The Government supports the intent of this recommendation as an important issue for consideration. This recommendation will be forwarded to the people working on the development of the State Housing Strategy for their consideration and action.

## 1.2 INCREASE GOVERNMENT FUNDING FOR SOCIAL HOUSING

### Taskforce recommendations:

- 1.2.1 *The Taskforce considers that a key underlying principle of the Commonwealth State Housing Agreement (CSHA) is to have a mandate to address homelessness.***
- 1.2.2 *The Taskforce supports the retention and enhancement of the CHSA with a clear focus on homelessness.***
- 1.2.3 *Injection of Commonwealth funds to maintain and increase current social housing and stock levels.***
- 1.2.4 *Injection of State funds to maintain and increase current social housing stock levels.***
- 1.2.5 *The State to negotiate with the Commonwealth for an increase in funding for Aboriginal housing.***

### Government Response:

The Government supports a strong social housing agenda. In 2001/2002, for the first time since 1996, the actual numbers of housing stock has not fallen. The Government is embarking on a program to increase overall stock because there has been a steady decline in social housing since 1996. This program provides the basis for rebuilding numbers and over the next five years the Government will incrementally increase social housing.

A special one-off injection of \$10.5 million will be made to provide additional public housing. \$5 million will be allocated for general public housing and \$5.5 million to provide special needs housing to be targeted at people with mental health problems and people leaving prisons.

The Commonwealth State Housing Agreement is an agreement between the Commonwealth and States for the funding and provision of social housing. The current agreement ends on 30 June 2003 and negotiations started towards the end of 2001 to develop a new agreement. To give certainty to the States on future funding, all parties are seeking to finalise a new Commonwealth State Housing Agreement by July 2002.

When negotiating the next Commonwealth State Housing Agreement, the Government will ensure that all groups in society, including people who are homeless or at risk of becoming homeless, will have their housing needs addressed. Increased funding from the Commonwealth will be sought to increase the amount of social housing that is affordable for low-income households. Any increase from the Commonwealth will be matched by the State.

In line with the Government's "Statement of Commitment to a new and just relationship with Indigenous Western Australians", funds will continue to be committed to improving the housing conditions of Indigenous people in remote communities. An increased funding commitment from the Commonwealth is currently being sought to help in meeting the large housing need.

The State is also negotiating an innovative bi-lateral housing infrastructure agreement with Commonwealth through ATSIC. This \$80 million agreement will provide for needs to be determined at the local level and facilitate the joining up of planning and service delivery. Housing management plans will provide for the better coordination of housing services for Indigenous people. It is expected that the Commonwealth, State and ATSIC will reach agreement allowing for a 1 July 2002 start date.

### **1.2.6 Local Government to be involved in a three way partnership with State and Commonwealth Government in negotiating CSHA**

The Government recognises the importance of local government in housing. Housing markets vary between locations and local knowledge is extremely important in determining needs and solutions. Any across-government solutions must involve local government. Local government can also be an important catalyst for increasing the amount of affordable housing in their area by making suitable adjustments to local town planning schemes and entering joint venture partnerships with the Department of Housing and Works.

The State Government will ask the Commonwealth to invite local government to participate in the Commonwealth State Housing Agreement negotiations.

## **1.3 BROADEN OPPORTUNITIES FOR INCREASING THE AMOUNT, DURABILITY AND TYPE OF AFFORDABLE HOUSING**

### ***Taskforce recommendations:***

**1.3.1 *Increase the use of durable building materials and fittings in social housing.***

**1.3.2 *Increase the quality of housing in Indigenous Communities to eliminate 'homelessness in homelands'.***

### **Government Response:**

The Government supports these recommendations. The Government will continue to work towards improving the state of housing in remote Indigenous communities. This work is progressing through the Department's Management Support Program and its Remote Village Construction Program. In 2002/03, \$7.35 million will be spent on the management support program and town reserve normalisation program with \$12 million for the commencement of 49 new units and completion of 40 units of accommodation in Indigenous communities.

### ***Taskforce recommendations:***

**1.3.3 *Increasing Aboriginal management to 18% of urban community housing stock.***

**1.3.4 *Community Housing reaches a target of 18% of Aboriginal occupancy***

### **Government Response:**

The Government fully supports the control of services provided to Indigenous people by Indigenous organisations. The Department of Housing and Works will encourage an increase in the management of community housing by Indigenous groups by providing infrastructure support and training. The Community Housing Coalition of WA will be the main vehicle for assisting Indigenous groups to acquire the necessary skills to manage community housing.

In terms of an occupancy target of 18%, the Department of Housing and Works currently allocates 10% of its Community Housing funds to community housing organisations that house Indigenous people. Community housing organisations now have an Indigenous occupancy rate of 3.4% of total stock (3,324 properties). Therefore, it is proposed to achieve the target figure of 18% over a five-year term with a target of 5% by 30 June 2003.

## **1.4 OPTIMISE THE ACCESS AND USE OF EXISTING HOUSING FOR PEOPLE LOW INCOMES**

### ***Taskforce recommendation:***

**1.4.1 *Develop a system to enable data matching of tenants on waiting lists for long term community housing and public housing. One off project.***

### **Government Response:**

This project is supported as it will provide better statistics on the need for social housing and will prevent double counting of applications. The Department of Housing and Works will develop the system in conjunction with the Community Housing Coalition of WA, as part of the Community Housing Strategic Plan that is due for completion by 31 December 2002.

### ***Taskforce recommendation:***

**1.4.2 *Review and implement changes to transitional accommodation provided through the Crisis Accommodation Program to enable the tenant to take the lease and a replacement property provided.***

### **Government Response:**

The Government supports this recommendation recognising that once a person is stabilised in externally supported accommodation then it makes more sense for the person to stay put and another property allocated to the Crisis Accommodation Program. Therefore, the Department of Housing and Works and the Department for Community Development will develop suitable protocols for the implementation of this recommendation.

### ***Taskforce recommendation:***

**1.4.3 *Increase the amount of bond assistance currently provided by Housing and Works for people to access private rental to the full cost of the bond and two weeks rent in advance.***

### **Government Response:**

As from 1 March 2002, the Government increased the maximum bond loan amounts to better reflect the amount of bond required. This is an increase of \$1.2 million in a full year and is the first increase in a decade. The need for further increases will be considered when the impact of this current increase is evaluated. In the meantime, the Department has some flexibility to provide additional loan funds, where special circumstances exist such as enabling a rough sleeper to access private rental.

### ***Taskforce recommendations:***

**1.4.4 *Examine options for incentives for private landlords to accommodate people on low incomes***

**1.4.5 *Department of Housing and Works build on the current pilot project with the Real Estate Institute of WA to enable Aboriginal people and young people to access private rental by headleasing private rental stock, underwriting potential damage and the provision of support.***

### **Government Response:**

The Government supports these recommendations. The Department of Housing and Works has established a pilot project with the Real Estate Institute of WA to assist 10 Indigenous families into

private rental sector accommodation. The Department will underwrite any rent loss or property damage and provide additional support to the tenants where appropriate, at an estimated cost of \$100,000. A review of the trial will be complete by 31 December 2002.

Further options for increasing the access of low-income households to the private rental sector will be explored in the development of *Housing Strategy WA*.

**Taskforce recommendations:**

**1.4.6 *Abolish the letting fee currently charged by real estate agents.***

**1.4.7 *Ensure security of tenure for long term tenants in caravan parks and boarding/lodging houses by investigating the merits of legislating to protect the tenure of long term residents in caravan parks, lodging and boarding houses.***

**Government Response:**

The Government is undertaking a Review of the *Residential Tenancies Act 1987* that regulates the relationship between owners and tenants under residential tenancy agreements. A Discussion Paper on the Act was released for public consultation in February 2002.

The Government has highlighted residents in caravan parks and park homeowners as stakeholders in the Discussion Paper. While the outcomes cannot be pre-empted, these issues will be carefully examined to achieve a balance between the rights of all stakeholders covered by the Act.

## **1.5 ADDRESSING INCOME SUPPORT ISSUES**

**Taskforce Recommendations:**

**1.5.1 *The State to negotiate with the Commonwealth to increase income support for all people to eliminate the discrepancies between pensions and allowances.***

**1.5.2 *The State to negotiate with the Commonwealth to have the level of income support paid to a young person living independently raised to the adult level.***

**Government Response:**

The Government supports a fair and equitable safety net system for Australians who are out of the workforce. A number of forums exist for pursuing these matters. The Department of the Premier and Cabinet is engaged in discussions through the Council of Australian Governments.

Through the Community Services Ministers Advisory Council, there are ongoing discussions with other States, Territories and the Commonwealth. A recent development has been the establishment of a Working Group to examine the impact of the Commonwealth Strategy *Australians Working Together*. The Department for Community Development will raise these issues in these forums and directly with the Commonwealth Minister for Family and Community Services.

The Government will also continue to highlight Commonwealth Government actions that shift responsibility for income support to the States.

### **1.5.3 *The State to ask the Commonwealth to urgently address the negative impact of the practice of 'breaching' on creating homelessness.***

The Government recognises that people in receipt of benefits have an obligation to the community. Rorting the system cannot be tolerated and measures to eliminate this behaviour need to be pursued. However, the Government does not support unnecessarily punitive measures against vulnerable people. The State Government will use the current mechanisms for Commonwealth State discussions to raise issues where vulnerable people are put at housing risk due to income support penalties.

The State Government also notes that there has been action in the area of "breaching" over the past months. The release of the Commonwealth Government's response to the Centrelink *Review of Breaching Practices and Guidelines* on 4 March 2002, has highlighted the acceptance of the need for change to protect vulnerable people. The release of the *Independent Review of Breaches and Penalties in the Social Security System* authored by Professor Pierce and commissioned by the Australian Council of Social Service, the Community and Public Sector Union and nine other not-for-profit community service organisations on 11 March 2002 further identified the continuing need for compassion and justice in the Social Security system. The Government supports ongoing dialogue to ensure the right balance between support and measures to reduce fraud.

## **2. ACCESS TO SUPPORT SERVICES**

### **2.1 SUPPORT AND ADVOCACY TO PREVENT HOMELESSNESS**

#### ***Taskforce Recommendations:***

**2.1.1 *All existing services providing support and advocacy to continue including the Supported Housing Assistance Program, Tenants Advice Services, Financial counselling.***

#### **Government Response:**

The Government supports this recommendation and has provided additional funding. The continuation of support services to assist people in maintaining their accommodation and supporting them in making the transition into housing is an essential component of the Government's response.

The Government recognises that across-government responses are essential in this area, as people's needs do not fit into one portfolio area.

#### ***Taskforce Recommendation:***

**2.1.2 *Implement new Support and Advocacy Services for people in social and private rental.***

#### **Government Response:**

The Government supports this recommendation and is providing \$1 million in the first year rising to \$2 million annually to boost assistance to private and public sector tenants to help keep them housed. These new services have been approved as part of the package of services designed to assist people in remaining in their own accommodation and enabling people to make the transition from homelessness into housing with support to meet their needs.

These additional services will be provided through a new program to be established by the Department for Community Development and the Supported Housing Assistance Program.

***Taskforce Recommendation:***

***2.1.3 Develop practical in home support services to assist people in gaining the skills to manage in a home. These services to be developed with the Aboriginal communities and migrant communities where appropriate.***

**Government Response:**

The Government supports this recommendation, recognising that some people need practical assistance in developing the skills to manage a home. The Department for Community Development will work with local Indigenous communities and the Department of Housing and Works to develop services in this area. \$150 000 through the Government's *Family Strength* program is committed for the development of these services. It is anticipated that there will be one metropolitan service and one country service. Options, including the provision of smaller services provided through local Aboriginal communities and the potential to involve Local Government, will be explored.

***Taskforce Recommendation:***

***2.1.4 Develop a garden maintenance program available to people in public housing, payment through rental payments.***

**Government Response:**

The Government supports this recommendation. The Department of Justice and the Department of Housing and Works will investigate the feasibility of developing a service provided by people on community based offender orders to people in public housing.

The Department of Housing and Works will also investigate the feasibility of working with the Commonwealth to develop Work for Dole initiatives in this area.

***Taskforce Recommendation:***

***2.1.5 Increase the Community Drug Teams ability to provide immediate support to people in supported accommodation services, in lodging/boarding houses and where the people are staying.***

**Government Response:**

The Government supports initiatives to address substance abuse in the community. The Government acknowledged the impact of drug use in regard to recommendations from the Community Drug Summit in 2001 and supported a holistic approach to addressing drug abuse. The link between maintaining stability in accommodation and access to drug treatment is recognised.

The Government has extended the support provided by youth Supported Accommodation Assistance Program services by increasing the capacity of existing crisis accommodation services to work with drug and alcohol issues. New services are being developed in the southern corridor. The Drug and Alcohol Office currently funds the Joondalup Youth Support Service and Swan Emergency Accommodation for one drug and alcohol worker to support young people with alcohol and drug problems, as well as to support staff in managing these issues.

An additional \$150 000 per annum is available through the Department of Health, Drug and Alcohol Office to provide staff for the youth Supported Accommodation Assistance Program services in Rockingham, Armadale and a new youth Supported Accommodation Assistance Program service to be established in Fremantle this year. These positions will work closely with the Community Drug Service Teams to provide ongoing support to young people with alcohol and other drug problems.

***Taskforce Recommendation:***

***2.1.6 Increase the level of immediate clinical support for people with mental illness in all areas by increasing the capacity of the local Mental Health Teams to meet the demand of people in need.***

**Government Response:**

The Government recognises the pressing problems of housing and people with mental health problems and will provide \$500 000 in 2002/03 rising to \$800 000 to establish a new south metropolitan service for vulnerable youth with mental health problems. This initiative builds on a successful model operating in the inner city and provides intensive case management and therapeutic services to youth with serious mental health problems.

Further, the Government notes that the significant increase in the number and size of clinical community based mental health teams in all metropolitan, rural and remote regions since 1995. These teams provide a range of specialist clinical assessment and treatment services to adults, older persons, children and adolescents. This expansion has resulted in a 31 per cent increase in the number of people receiving community mental health services from 1995 to 1999.

Simultaneously, there has been an expansion in support services for people with mental illness throughout the State. These include a range of services that assist people to live successfully in the community, including supported accommodation services, in-home community support, carer support and respite services.

In addition to programs that directly provide mental health services, formal partnerships have been formed with a range of agencies whose clients include people with mental illness. For example, the development of protocols with Supported Accommodation Assistance Program agencies formalises partnerships between specialist Department of Health mental health services, Department for Community Development and non-government organisations, whereby specialist clinical assessment and consultancy to non-government organisations is provided. Other significant partnerships include those with Police and the Department of Housing and Works.

***Taskforce Recommendation:***

***2.1.7 Increase the amount of financial counselling available to people at risk of homelessness.***

**Government Response:**

The Government will provide an additional \$500 000 annually to increase the capacity of financial counselling services to work with a broader group of people who are at risk of becoming homeless through increasing debt.

Financial counselling services are part of the bundle of services to assist people in avoiding homelessness.

The Department for Community Development currently provides \$2.3 million for 52 financial counselling services around the State. These services are well used by the Department of Housing and Works to assist people manage their rental and mortgage payments as well as by other support services.

***Taskforce Recommendation:***

***2.1.8 Develop a system to monitor evictions due to anti social behaviour to identify where they have been racially motivated.***

**Government Response:**

The Government is developing an anti-racism strategy to:

- Recognise, challenge and work towards eliminating racism in Western Australia
- Create a culture which seeks to include all members and respects and appreciates cultural, linguistic and religious diversity
- Develop and implement practical and workable strategies to address racism.

This recommendation will be referred to the Office of Citizenship and Multicultural Interests for their consideration in developing the strategy.

The Department of Housing and Works continues to collate such information for evictions from public housing on a monthly basis, reporting to the Housing Advisory Committee, Equal Opportunity Commission and Minister for Housing and Works. However, this is extremely difficult to monitor in the private sector.

***Taskforce Recommendation:***

***2.1.9 Develop living skills as part of the course for students at risk. The Curriculum Council in consultation with the Youth Affairs Council of WA, develop an appropriate curriculum on living skills for students at risk.***

**Government Response:**

The Government supports this recommendation and feedback to the Post Compulsory Education Review, conducted by the Curriculum Council, included substantial support for the development of such skills as part of a students program of study in year 11 and 12.

The development of appropriate curriculum will involve stakeholders including the Department of Education and the Youth Affairs Council of WA. The Department of Education would then deliver this through a range of strategies including virtual learning and alternative programs.

## **2.2 LEAVING INSTIUTIONAL AND LONG TERM CARE**

The Government fully supports increased effort in enabling people to make a successful transition from care to independent housing. It is a key area in limiting the negative impact of homelessness on people's lives.

***Taskforce Recommendation:***

***2.2.1 The Department for Community Development develops leaving care strategies for young people which include the development of independent living options and the development of living skills to manage.***

## **Government Response:**

The Government has recognised that young people who have been in the care of the Department face multiple jeopardies in their transition from childhood to independence. In particular, young people leaving care have been found to experience a greater risk of homelessness, unemployment, drug and alcohol abuse, mental health problems, early parenting, loneliness, poverty and involvement with the justice system.

The Government will quadruple the funds to support this group through the transition from State care to independent living by injecting an additional \$600 000 per year.

The Government will ensure that young people graduating from long-term care provided by the Department for Community Development have every opportunity to establish themselves as participating citizens in the community. This is a high priority for Government. The lack of support for young people leaving long term supported care and accommodation has been an ongoing problem. Young people leaving care have been found to experience homelessness, unemployment, drug and alcohol abuse, mental health problems, early parenthood, loneliness, poverty and involvement in the justice system.

The Government will introduce new legislation to place child protection and community development into the contemporary environment. The Department for Community Development's proposed legislation includes a raft of provisions for young people leaving care including the provision of advice, information, access to counselling, the development with the young person of a plan for their future and the option for the Department to provide additional financial support to assist with education and household formation.

Additionally, the Government is working with the Commonwealth Government and other jurisdictions to develop a framework and bilateral agreement for the Commonwealth's new Transition to Independent Living for young people leaving care. The Commonwealth initiative was announced as a payment of up to \$1 000 to assist young people in establishing themselves independently. Indications are that the payments will not be made to individual young people.

### ***Taskforce Recommendation:***

***2.2.2 The Department for Community Development ensures that case planning involving families where children are at risk, includes strategies designed to assist people in developing skills to manage in independent long term accommodation.***

## **Government Response:**

The Government will enhance responses to reducing the risk of families becoming homeless and recognises that where other issues bring a family to the Department for Community Development, stable accommodation is a fundamental requirement.

The Department for Community Development acknowledges that stable housing is a key factor in ensuring that children have the best possible environment for development. The Department is re-establishing a community development focus. This provides an opportunity to examine the manner in which services are provided. The Department will develop strategies to provide training opportunities to departmental and non-government workers to address homelessness issues.

**Taskforce Recommendation:**

**2.2.3 Department of Health promotes and implements responsible discharge planning where people leave hospital care to long term stable accommodation, not being referred into immediate access crisis accommodation.**

**Government Response:**

The Government supports appropriate discharge planning. All Health Services have the responsibility to plan and arrange suitable discharge plans for people leaving any type of service.

The Department of Health is committed to meeting the Australian Council on Healthcare Standards that specifically include effective discharge planning.

A significant part of the National Mental Health Policy has been the establishment of the *National Standards for Mental Health Services* that commit services to effective discharge planning. These mental health standards augment the general health standards and are currently being implemented throughout the State. By June 2003, public mental health services throughout Western Australia are required to have a confirmed date set to review their compliance with these standards.

The Government will provide \$160 000 in 2002/03 rising to \$260 000 to enable people leaving temporary and emergency non-government services to receive active assistance and rehabilitation to enable them to remain in long-term accommodation. This will assist hospital discharge and free-up temporary support for those in greater need.

**Taskforce Recommendations:**

**2.2.4 The Department of Justice develop strategies to enhance release planning for people leaving prison with longer sentences.**

**2.2.5 The Department of Justice provide more supported accommodation for prisoners leaving gaol and detention. This would require additional resources to provide to community organisations providing such services.**

**Government Response:**

The Government supports initiatives designed to assist ex-prisoners in stabilising their lifestyle as soon as possible after release and will provide \$340 000 annually to provide more supported accommodation for adult prisoners and young offenders prisoners exiting the justice system. This decreases the risk of homelessness and re-offending.

The Department of Justice has recently introduced the case management of prisoners. This process helps to prepare offenders for their release.

No offenders are released on parole (or Work Release or Home Detention) without suitable and stable accommodation to go to. The Department has no control over those prisoners who are released to freedom. A number of prisoners are denied early release because they do not have adequate release plans, which in many cases is due to a lack of suitable accommodation.

The Department of Justice and the Department of Housing and Works will work together to develop improved processes to assist prisoners accessing housing on release from prison. Housing and Works will provide additional accommodation that is dedicated to the needs of these people.

## **2.3 LONG TERM ACCOMMODATION WITH SUPPORT**

### ***Taskforce Recommendation:***

#### ***2.3.1 The Disability Services Commission provides more support for people in long-term supported accommodation***

##### **Government Response:**

The Government acknowledges the need for increased support for people requiring long-term accommodation. The Government allocated an additional \$2.67 million in 2001/02 and in 2002/03 will provide further growth funds of \$3.125 million. This will be allocated as part of the Disability Services Commission Combined Applications Process and should meet the recommended resourcing levels.

The Government is renegotiating the Commonwealth State Disability Agreement and is seeking additional funding from the Commonwealth to reflect their responsibilities in this area.

### ***Taskforce Recommendation:***

#### ***2.3.2 Increase the number of beds available to the frail aged who are unable to return home or to their previous accommodation by negotiating an increase in frail aged care beds by the Commonwealth Government.***

##### **Government Response:**

The Government supports this recommendation and notes that the Commonwealth has responsibility in this area. The Premier is vigorously pursuing the Commonwealth Government on this issue because it needs urgent action. All States are experiencing problems with the availability of residential aged care beds.

In the Perth Metropolitan area, on average at any time there are 130-150 people in public hospitals waiting for a bed in a Commonwealth-funded residential aged care facility. The Commonwealth is responsible for capital and recurrent funding for these facilities, and the State will continue to negotiate sufficient support.

The Department of Health has established the Care Awaiting Placement Program. This is a fully State funded program that aims to facilitate the transfer of care for patients in the acute aged care sector to appropriate aged care services. The program provides a combination of therapy based services, home care services and interim residential services. In 2000 the Care Awaiting Placement Program was further expanded to respond to the pressure on beds in the acute care sector.

The Government has committed \$21 million to commission up to 150 aged care beds plus \$3 million capital for interim aged care facilities for Care Awaiting Placement Program purposes over the next four years. At present, there are 104 residential Care Awaiting Placement Program beds in the metropolitan area.

**Taskforce Recommendation:**

**2.3.3 Increase the aged care options available to Indigenous aged people living in remote communities and regional areas. Establish joint programs including the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission, Housing and Works and Commonwealth Aged Care to develop safe supported housing particularly for elderly Indigenous people within their communities.**

**Government Response:**

The Government supports this recommendation. The Home and Community Care Program is a cost shared Commonwealth and State program that aims to promote the provision of a range of basic maintenance and support services for frail aged people, younger people with disabilities and their carers. The program aims to enhance quality of life and/or prevent premature or inappropriate admission to long-term residential care. These Home and Community Care Program services ensure that people are able to remain in the community, rather than going into institutionalised care with the resulting impact on their health and quality of life. All people with a functional disability are eligible for Home and Community Care Program services and this includes Indigenous people living in remote communities. Specific Home and Community Care Program services for Indigenous people have been established in Western Australia. These include culturally appropriate services operating in metropolitan, regional and remote areas.

Home and Community Care Program services were expanded by \$9.5 million in 2001/02. Services specifically for Indigenous people were among those expanded through this additional funding. These services are located in Mt Baker, Albany, Jigalong, the Western Desert and the Kimberley.

**Taskforce Recommendations:**

**2.3.4 Increase the number of small scale supported accommodation options for people with mental illness and/or acquired brain injury.**

**2.3.6 Develop more independent living accommodation options which have appropriate stock and appropriate support services available to people with mental illness and/or acquired brain injury.**

**Government Response:**

The Government supports the recommendations that underline the importance of ensuring supports to enable people to retain the maximum amount of independent living in the community. These areas have joined up services provided through the Disability Services Commission, the Department of Health and the Department of Housing and Works. The need for additional services is acknowledged.

Ranges of supported community living services are provided for people with mental illness. These include a range of supported accommodation services including the Department of Health's Independent Living Program established in partnership with the Department of Housing and Works.

Supported community living services will be expanded through the provision of an additional \$4.0 million over four years. In addition, \$2.6 million will expand support services for families throughout the State over four years.

As part of the expansion of supported community living services, for the severely disabled people who are living in Graylands and other psychiatric hospitals, an extensive process of individualised planning is being used to determine needs and preferences and facilitate supported community

living. The “Community Options 100” project has been initiated and will establish supported homes for people who have been patients at Graylands Hospital for long periods of time.

The Department of Health’s commitment to a range of supported accommodation services is articulated in the policy *Supported Community Living for People with Psychiatric Disability – Living in the Community*. This policy indicates the philosophy and future directions for the supported community living program for Western Australians with a mental illness.

The Department of Housing and Works currently provides a minimum of 120 units per annum under its Community Disability Housing Program and has recently agreed to increase the number for the Disability Services Commission from 60 to 65.

***Taskforce Recommendation:***

***2.3.5 Reduce the possibility of homelessness for all newly arrived migrants and refugees regardless of their visa status through negotiation with the Commonwealth to minimise overcrowding caused by people unable to obtain appropriate housing.***

**Government Response:**

The Government supports this recommendation and notes that the Commonwealth has primary responsibility in the area of settlement services. The Department of Housing and Works leases units to the Department of Immigration, Multicultural and Indigenous Affairs for use by newly arrived humanitarian refugees.

People on Temporary Protection Visas are able to access bond assistance to assist them in moving into housing in the private rental market through the Department of Housing and Works. They are eligible to register their interest on the public housing waiting list.

The Department for Community Development is directly involved in the provision of services to unaccompanied refugee minors and is currently renegotiating a Memorandum of Understanding with the Department of Immigration, Multicultural and Indigenous Affairs. Through the Supported Accommodation Assistance Program, the Department is also involved in funding services provided to migrant and refugee people who are homeless.

***Taskforce Recommendation:***

***2.3.7 Increase the availability of long term supported housing for young people.***

**Government Response:**

The Government recognises that some young people need ongoing supported accommodation. The Department for Community Development is investigating methods to increase the numbers and types of services available. In particular the Department is keen to provide additional services designed to assist families in managing and to avoid children and young people being placed in care or young people being forced to move out of home. The Department will continue to pursue strategies to reduce the numbers of children and young people moving into care.

***Taskforce Recommendation:***

***2.3.8 Department of Health and the Department of Justice implement headleasing arrangements in the private rental sector as a way of providing long term accommodation for people with mental illness and people leaving prisons.***

**Government Response:**

The Government supports the principle of enabling people to access private rental. Private rental affords choice in location and housing type for people. People in receipt of income support are able to access Commonwealth Rent Assistance. The Department of Justice is investigating options with the Department of Housing and Works for achieving better accommodation options for people leaving prison.

The Departments of Health, Justice and Housing and Works will work together to develop flexible ways of providing accommodation and support for people in the private rental sector.

## **2.4 SUPPORT FOR PEOPLE WHO ARE HOMELESS**

### **2.4.1 Emergency supported accommodation**

***Taskforce Recommendation:***

***2.4.1.1 Review policies and practices – to identify ways to progressively implement changes to improve the service system.***

**Government Response:**

The Government supports this recommendation as a way of addressing the need for changes in the service system. The Department for Community Development, the Department of Health and the Department of Justice will work together to facilitate this process.

***Taskforce Recommendation:***

***2.4.1.2 Work on joint ventures involving Aboriginal Hostels Ltd, Department of Housing and Works, Department of Indigenous Affairs, private sector hotel, motel, caravan park operators to develop short term housing options for Indigenous people visiting towns and cities.***

**Government Response:**

The Government supports the development of joined up responses including State, Commonwealth and community agencies to address these issues.

The Department of Housing and Works and ATSIC are currently addressing the issue of rough sleepers in the inner city who require supported hostel type accommodation. A proposal to develop an Aboriginal hostel in East Perth is being explored jointly by the Department of Housing and Works and Aboriginal Hostels Ltd.

***Taskforce Recommendation:***

***2.4.1.3 An increase in youth accommodation services in regional areas has been identified. Cost \$150,000 for this service.***

**Government Response:**

The Government will address the issue of youth supported accommodation. An election commitment is to provide an additional \$2 million over four years to increase supported accommodation services for young people. A new service will be provided in Fremantle at a cost of \$350 000 per year. The Department of Health is also funding an alcohol and other drug support worker for this new service. Funding of \$150 000 per year has been identified for a new service in Broome. Both these services have been identified as priorities for an extended period of time.

***Taskforce Recommendation:***

***2.4.1.4 Develop increased access to supported accommodation and appropriate support services for men after an incident of family violence.***

**Government Response:**

The Government supports this recommendation. The Department for Community Development is providing \$350,000 per year for this service and the Department of Housing and Works will provide accommodation under the Crisis Accommodation Program. The service has been advertised for requests for proposals with a view to selecting the service provider by the end of May 2002.

A monitoring program will be developed with other interested community organisations to assess the effectiveness of this approach in responding to family violence.

**2.4.2 Developing services that assist people into long term accommodation with support.**

***Taskforce Recommendation:***

***2.4.2.1 The development of a bypass service as a joint Department for Community Development and Department of Housing and Works initiative, with the support service being provided by a non government organisation.***

**Government Response:**

The Government supports this initiative as being part of the key focus on assisting people in transition and will provide \$250 000 annually to establish this new emergency service.

The new support service will be established in Perth to fast track people who are newly homeless or about to become homeless into alternative accommodation. This service will complement the Homeless Helpline that was established as part of the Homelessness Taskforce. It will assist those people who do not require ongoing supported accommodation by providing access to short term emergency accommodation, prompt assistance into long term accommodation, linking clients to financial and other counselling services if required and providing follow up support to ensure clients are stabilised in their tenancies.

Currently, most people are stabilised in 24-hour residential emergency accommodation services before being moved into their own long-term accommodation. This is an expensive service option and not always required.

The Department for Community Development and the Department of Housing and Works are working together to assist people who are homeless and need emergency accommodation linked into support services. Effective examples where these initiatives have been implemented include the development of protocols between the Department of Housing and Works and services funded through the Supported Accommodation Assistance Program. People seeking immediate accommodation approach both the Department of Housing and Works and the Department for Community Development. Service delivery is being improved through joining up responses.

The Department of Housing and Works Homeless Helpline is currently developing ways of working with Supported Accommodation service providers to assist long-term residents in moving into independent accommodation thereby making way for new people in crisis.

***Taskforce Recommendation:***

**2.4.2.2 *Continue the Homeless Helpline as part of the service system.***

**Government Response:**

The Homeless Helpline was established at an annual cost of \$275 000 per annum at the time the Homelessness Taskforce was announced. The Helpline is being redeveloped by the Department of Housing and Works to continue to provide the link between the Department of Housing and Works, private sector housing and the supported and emergency housing sector to improve the response to the homeless with a major focus on rough sleepers.

***Taskforce Recommendation:***

**2.4.2.3 *Develop a demonstration project to include adequate facilities such as ablution blocks with showers, cooking facilities, and shelter.***

**Government Response:**

The City of Perth and the Town of Port Hedland have expressed an interest in trialing such projects. The City proposal will be referred to the Indigenous Affairs Northbridge Priority Project Working Group to determine whether such a facility can contribute to addressing the complex issues surrounding Aboriginal people in the inner city.

The Department of Indigenous Affairs will assist in negotiating with the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission to investigate funding and support for these options.

The Kalgoorlie Boulder City Council has established a similar project in Yarri Road Camp. The Department of Indigenous Affairs will continue to monitor such activity.

***Taskforce Recommendation:***

**2.4.2.4 *Develop an action research project initially focussing on people who have been banned from services and who may be unable to secure any support services. The project would work intensively with people assisting them into accommodation and documenting effective interventions.***

**Government Response:**

The Government recognises that banning vulnerable people from services is problematic and supports the research project. The Department for Community Development will work with the Western Australian Council of Social Service and the Lotteries Commission to secure funding for this important development.

### ***Taskforce Recommendation***

***2.4.2.5 The Development of campus accommodation as an option for school students to enable them to have the stability to complete their schooling. Joint ventures with the Department of Education supplying a portion of the school grounds as land for the development. The Department of Housing and Works building appropriate one and two bedroom units and local youth services providing minimal support. Begin with a demonstration project to assess viability.***

### **Government Response:**

The Government supports this proposal in principle. Lack of appropriate accommodation has been identified as a key factor for young people who do not complete their schooling, particularly those at risk of offending or those in detention. Support in finding accommodation (particularly supported accommodation), interagency collaboration and case management can result in a significant improvement in retention of young people in education.

Cyril Jackson Senior Campus has commenced planning in partnership with the Department of Housing and Works, Department of Education and the Eastern Metropolitan Community Housing Association Inc. Under this arrangement the Department of Education would provide the land, the Department of Housing and Works would provide the buildings and Eastern Metropolitan Community Housing Association would provide property and tenancy management.

Under this proposal purpose-built accommodation will be constructed for students on the Cyril Jackson Senior Campus site.

### **2.4.3 Specialist services to assist people who are homeless.**

#### ***Taskforce Recommendation:***

***2.4.3.1 Provide additional sobering up shelters for Indigenous people in Perth City and other regional areas where such services are not available.***

### **Government Response:**

The Government reaffirms its commitment stated in the Response to the Community Drug Summit to the development of a range of drug related services available for Indigenous people.

There are currently 10 sobering up shelters in WA for Indigenous people, two of which are funded through the Department of Health's Office of Aboriginal Health. These are:

- Milliya Rumara in Broome, and
- Waringarri in Kununurra

These services provide counselling, referrals, educational health promotion and community development programs to Indigenous people affected by alcohol and other substances.

The State has earmarked funding for proposed initiatives in the alcohol and substance misuse area next financial year, including sobering up shelters. This will complement the \$350 000 pa earmarked by the Commonwealth for sobering up shelters for the next five years.

The Government will also work with ATSIC about a specific proposal for a sobering-up shelter in inner city Perth.

**Taskforce Recommendation:**

**2.4.3.2 Increase in services working with the children of people who are homeless as a result of domestic violence and other crises.**

**Government Response:**

The recommendation from the State Homelessness Taskforce is supported as it recognises that over half the children accompanying homeless people are in services for homeless families and even in youth externally supported accommodation services. The Government will provide an additional \$330 000 in 2002/03 rising to \$1.05 million, to provide new services and bolster existing services.

The Government will ensure that children who are accompanying parents to women's refuges, safe houses and other services for homeless people receive services appropriate to their needs. To progress this agenda, the Government is working in collaboration with the Commonwealth through the Partnerships Against Domestic Violence and cooperatively across Government and community agencies through the Family Violence Coordinating Committee and local Domestic Violence Regional Coordinating Committees.

The Government has allocated \$100 000 per year for initiatives to support children accompanying their mothers into women's refuges. This funding has been allocated to Yorgum to assist Indigenous children who have been affected by family violence.

This is in addition to the \$409 000 per year paid through four different non-government organisations to assist children who have been affected by domestic or family violence.

Around 40% of clients in Supported Accommodation Assistance Program services are accompanying children. There are around 500 children in Supported Accommodation Assistance Program services on any one night.

On an annual basis the number of children moving through these services is much higher. In 1999/00, around 5 000 children accompanied parents to Supported Accommodation Assistance Program services and were assisted on 7 800 occasions.

The Department for Community Development is progressively seeking to establish:

- Additional services in the country to work with children in women's refuges - \$225 000 in the first year rising to \$450 000 per year. This will provide an additional \$25 000 for 18 women's refuge services throughout the country with the exception of Albany and Bunbury where services are already available.
- Two support services at \$200 000 annually from July 2003 to work with dependent children in family supported accommodation services in the metropolitan area.
- One support service at \$200 000 annually from January 2003 for young parents focussing on parenting and the needs of their children where the parent/s are living in youth supported accommodation services in the metropolitan area.

***Taskforce Recommendation:***

***2.4.3.3 Expand the Street Doctor service.***

**Government Response:**

The Street Doctor pilot has been extended until 30 June 2002 under the Innovative Health Services for Homeless Youth (IHSY) Program and is expected to continue at an annual funding level of \$90,000. Expanded services will be planned.

***Taskforce Recommendation:***

***2.4.3.4 Investigate current day centres provided by local authorities for aged and disabled people for their applicability to a broader social group.***

**Government Response:**

The Government supports this recommendation. The Home and Community Care Program funds local government authorities to provide day centres. The aim of these day centres is to provide respite for carers and diversion therapy for the aged and disabled people attending. All aged or disabled people, including homeless people, are eligible to attend these day centres.

**2.4.4 Support for People who are Moving from Homelessness into Accommodation.**

***Taskforce Recommendation:***

***2.4.4.1 People have access to white goods, furniture and other household goods are available. Implement the Furniture bank project and other initiatives whereby people can receive furnishings etc by way of no interest loans and other options.***

**Government Response:**

The Government supports the establishment of systems to assist people to access furniture and other items required to set up a home. The Department for Community Development will liaise with the WA Council of Social Service and the Lotteries Commission to encourage the establishment of the Furniture Bank project.

The Department for Community Development will continue to fund the WA No Interest Loans Network to provide interest-free loans for people who need furniture and whitegoods.

***Taskforce Recommendation:***

***2.4.4.2 50% bad debt discount scheme implemented to ensure connection of essential services where a person is moving from homelessness into accommodation.***

**Government Response:**

Western Power, AlintaGas and the Water Corporation already provide customers who are having difficulty in paying current bills with flexible payment options. For example, bills can be paid off in weekly, fortnightly or monthly instalments depending on the financial situation of the customer.

Western Power contributes \$30 000 annually to an emergency relief fund administered by WACOSS to help people in financial difficulties, such as being unable to pay their electricity bill. In situations where a person moves from homelessness into accommodation and has an outstanding debt to Western Power, the Corporation would be prepared to connect supply provided the person maintained an arrangement to pay off the debt in easy payments. An informal arrangement with

the Department of Housing and Works Homeless Helpline is already in place for assisting people into emergency housing.

Utilities that are Government owned are expected to operate under commercial principles. Any discount debt scheme would have to be implemented as a community service obligation. Furthermore, not all utilities are Government owned. AlintaGas has been privatised and, with the planned introduction of full retail contestability in the gas market, additional non-Government retailers are expected to enter the market. Extension of this form of contestability to the electricity market is being considered. The Office of Energy proposes that a debt discount scheme would need to be funded by Government and made available to customers of all utility service providers.

### **3. ENHANCING IMPLEMENTATION**

#### **3.1 ESTABLISH IMPLEMENTATION COMMITTEE**

##### ***Taskforce Recommendation:***

##### ***3.1.1 Establish implementation Committee responsible to the Cabinet Standing Committee on Social Policy.***

##### **Government Response:**

The Government will establish a community and Government Committee to monitor the implementation of these initiatives. The committee will build on the positive experience and outcomes of the State Homelessness Taskforce and ensure that there is a true sense of collaboration in addressing homelessness in the state.

This committee will also be responsible for developing indicators to measure the Government's performance in responding to the Taskforce's recommendations and alleviating homelessness.

The Government identifies a strong link between the need for social inclusion strategies to reduce poverty and the strategies to assist people to retain stable housing. Over the next two years will bring these strategies together. The Government is keen to be able to assess progress over this broader agenda and will be evaluating the response. The committee will meet at six monthly intervals and report on progress to the Cabinet Standing Committee on Social Policy and send copies of the progress reports to the Western Australian Council of Social Service.

A final Evaluation Report will be submitted to Cabinet by 31 December 2003.

##### ***Taskforce Recommendation:***

##### ***3.1.2 Ensure that there are structural links between the Implementation Committee and the Indigenous Affairs Advisory Committee to ensure that strategies to enable the mapping of need and responses within Indigenous communities are integral to implementation.***

##### **Government Response:**

The Government will ensure the Indigenous Affairs Advisory Committee plays a key role in addressing homelessness in the Indigenous community. The Department of Indigenous Affairs will ensure that all relevant business arising in the Homelessness Monitoring Committee is readily available to the Indigenous Affairs Advisory Committee.

## **3.2 LEGISLATION**

### ***Taskforce Recommendation:***

#### ***3.2.1 Investigate the merit of drafting legislation to ensure accommodation and support services for people who are homeless.***

### **Government Response:**

The Government will be investigating the merits of legislation in addressing issues of social inclusion including issues of homelessness. The Department of the Premier and Cabinet will review the United Kingdom Homelessness Bill 2001 for its applicability to Western Australia. This piece of legislation is being progressively implemented. At the centre of the Bill is the commitment that everyone who is homeless through no fault of their own and has a priority need must be given accommodation and support.

This legislation, linking housing and support establishes a new framework for the United Kingdom, and recognizes the essential link between housing and support for people who find themselves homeless. Other legislation identified by the Taskforce will also be reviewed.

## **3.3 COMMUNITY EDUCATION**

### ***Taskforce Recommendation:***

#### ***3.3.1 Develop an information strategy to encourage debate and discussion on issues around homelessness.***

### **Government Response:**

The Government recognises the importance of public dialogue on major social issues. With the Western Australian Council of Social Service and the community, the Government will continue to ensure a high level of public debate and discussion around issues affecting the most vulnerable people in our community.

## **3.4 WORKING TOGETHER**

### ***Taskforce Recommendation:***

#### ***3.4.1 State Government agencies develop better ways of collecting data on people who are homeless.***

### **Government Response:**

The Government supports improving the level of understanding around homelessness and all State and Territory Governments are supporting the work of analysing the 2001 Census focusing on homelessness.

This information will assist Government agencies in developing better ways of understanding the number of people they work with who are homeless.

Western Australian government agencies will be cognizant of the need to include indicators of homelessness when redeveloping current client data collection methods.

***Taskforce Recommendation:***

***3.4.2 Develop a commitment across the government and community sector to work together in implementing the Action Plan.***

**Government Response:**

The Government is committed to the development of joined up services that include the State Government, Commonwealth Government, local governments and the community.

The new Homelessness Monitoring Committee will provide the framework for ensuring a shared commitment by the Government and community to this issue.

Government agencies will be required to work in partnership and collaborate with the community sector in the implementation of the many new initiatives outlined in this report. The Government believes a partnership approach will bring increased benefits and achieve a more rapid alleviation of homelessness in the State.

***Taskforce Recommendation:***

***3.4.3 Develop a method of centralising funding for new initiatives arising from the Taskforce across government portfolios.***

**Government Response:**

The Government is keen to develop better ways of funding whole of government initiatives and will continue to investigate opportunities.

***Taskforce Recommendation:***

***3.4.4 Developing flexibility in funding arrangement to enable government and community agencies to work together.***

**Government Response:**

The Government is committed to the development of more flexibility in funding arrangements for the not-for-profit sector.

The Working Party on Funding Agreements with Not-for-profit Organisations has completed and released a consultation report on proposed new arrangements. It is anticipated these new arrangements will come into effect from 1 July 2002.

These new arrangements will recognise the partnership between the community and the Government in the provision of services.