



## ***A campaign for better services for homeless people in W.A.***

**November 2004**

### **Overview of homelessness**

12,000 people in Western Australia and 100,000 people around Australia are homeless each night. Homeless people come from a broad range of backgrounds and ages, from the very young to the very old. More than a third of the homeless are children.

There are many reasons for homelessness including domestic violence, family conflict, poverty, racism and mental illness.

### **What are the costs of homelessness?**

There are human and financial costs to homelessness.

Human costs include poor health, unemployment, physical and emotional insecurity as well as the loneliness and grief. Once people become homeless they face rejection, discrimination and disadvantage from the broader society.

Financial costs include major use of the health and community services system.

### **What is the response to homelessness?**

Since 1985 the main national response to homelessness has been the Supported Accommodation Assistance Program (SAAP). SAAP is a joint Commonwealth-State agreement that provides funding to over 1200 agencies Australia wide. These agencies provide services and assistance to people who are homeless or in danger of becoming homeless. The current SAAP agreement expires in 2005.

Despite the fact there was a 25% increase in funding between SAAP III and SAAP IV, SAAP services are unable to meet the current demand for services. Every day hundreds of women, children and men desperately seeking temporary shelter are turned away. The chance of a homeless person being able to access a service is less than 50% on any night.

The problem is compounded by the fact that increases in funding since 2000/01 have only covered CPI and not met the real increase in costs. Although provision was made for the introduction of the Crisis Assistance, Supported Housing industry (CASH) award, there has been no provision to fund wage increments. The union has recently won a \$19 a week increase for workers in the industry. There is no additional funding to pay for this increase.

### **What services are provided to homeless people?**

The 124 SAAP services in WA provide a broad range of services to homeless people. These include:

- Accommodation
- Counseling
- Financial assistance and advice

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***The following organisations support this campaign:***



- Living skills, and
- Information.

They provide specialized services to youth, women escaping domestic violence, single men and families. Each year they provide support to around 9,300 people, each homeless person will use these services more than once and for about 5 days each time. In WA, the number of clients has increased by approximately 20% since 1996/97.

### **What are the consequences?**

Insufficient funding for SAAP agencies has meant a lack of available services for homeless people. Agencies are not able to meet the demand and can provide little more than basic services to homeless people.

SAAP agencies are under increasing financial pressure through increased demands on the service, higher insurance premiums, wage indexation and administration around the GST. The result is agencies are being forced to restructure to minimize staffing costs and skilled, experienced workers are lost.

This is creating a 'pressure pot' – where inexperienced, overworked employees try to support an increasingly frustrated and vulnerable group of people, whose needs are often very complex. Some SAAP agencies are forced into practices that can endanger people's lives.

### **What is needed?**

Homelessness is national shame, as access to housing is a basic human right. SAAP services provide an essential housing and support service to the community.

The "***More than a bed campaign***" for better services for homeless people seeks a commitment from the state and federal governments to increase SAAP funding by between 25% to maintain services. We are also seeking an annual indexation figure that reflects the **real** increase in costs. We are of the opinion that if the SAAP sector doesn't get the funding it needs, it is in danger of collapsing!

The campaign recognizes that there is a significant level of unmet need, and that this should be addressed in the new SAAP agreement. However, the priority is to secure a 25% increase to halt the decline in existing services.

### **Further information**

#### **Please contact:**

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## ***More than a bed.***

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