



Homelessness Australia

Creating a framework for ending homelessness

COMMONWEALTH GOVERNMENT – RAPID HOUSING RESPONSE FUND

Proposal

28th April 2020

Commonwealth Government – Rapid Housing Response Fund

1. Introduction

The 2016 census tells us that on any night there are around 116,000 homeless people across Australia, with 7% or around 8,000 of this number rough sleeping. Rough sleepers typically experience health and mental health comorbidities, making them particularly vulnerable in the context of the Covid-19 pandemic.

Some states and territories have introduced initiatives to assist rough sleepers but these are patchy, often small scale and in many cases focused on the immediate crisis response. Our view is that Federal Government should take a lead role and use the opportunity to support positive long term solutions to rough sleeping.

2. Proposal

The Department of Social Security (DSS) will administer a rapid housing response fund (RHRF) to provide additional housing and support to rough sleepers of any age or gender, with the highest level of need, and where conditions require their rehousing on public health grounds.

The fund is for the provision of accommodation with support for rough sleepers with the highest level of need. An initial two year fund is proposed with the opportunity to extend subject to a positive review¹. It is designed to support and / or encourage State / Territory match funding.

Eligible projects should involve assertive outreach and / or referrals to identify people with the highest level of need of such housing and support; securing accommodation for head leasing in the private rental sector; provision of tailored support, including health supports; tenancy and property management functions; and the opportunity for long-term housing.

The RHRF will provide a recurrent monthly payment to successful projects based on a fixed rate per individual / household accommodated quoted in the application. The tenant will contribute 25% of income as rent.

The RHRF will be capped at \$25M² for each financial year and make payments until at least 30 June 2022. It is anticipated that the RHRF:

¹ Two years is suggested recognising that unless additional social and affordable housing comes on stream it will be challenging to find move on accommodation for all those housed by the scheme over a short period.

² The budget to be set by the Commonwealth. A \$25M fund is given as an example. It uses figures based on Bridge Housing (Sydney) estimates of housing costs and support costs of \$45-50K per annum. Assuming individuals pay 25% of the housing cost and state/territory match fund, this fund would assist between 1,120 and 1,300 individuals. Costs of support and accommodation will vary across the country.

- Will be open to applications from existing schemes / partnerships with a proven track record of effectively identifying, housing and providing support to people sleeping rough. Critically the schemes must:
 - Demonstrate the need for the additional service in the localities in which they operate
 - Demonstrate that they have the capacity to expand immediately
 - Have a matching funding commitment for the scaling-up of their operation from the state / territory government or from another source
 - Where funding is not sought from the state / territory government secure its endorsement
 - Have a clear strategy for ensuring those assisted are not returned to homelessness at the end of their tenancy within the project
 - Have a proven track record of delivering high quality support to vulnerable groups
 - Must be led (or jointly led) by a registered community housing organisation and include at least one specialist homelessness support provider
- Will take applications from for funding from May to end June 2020. A streamlined assessment process will operate with successful schemes given a cap on numbers that able to be assisted at any one time.
- Successful applicants will be required to report monthly against set criteria.

Benefits

- Maximum utilisation of tried and tested legal instruments, expertise, local contacts and infrastructure of Community Housing Organisations (CHOs) to deliver an almost unlimited scaling up of the current community housing model across Australia. Also draws on expertise, contacts and experience of the specialist homelessness service sector in delivering assertive outreach and support to the formerly homeless
- Potential to create significant employment opportunities through CHOs and support services in a national large-scale mobilisation
- A strong public health outcome, ensuring rough sleepers with the highest level of need (are provided with safe and secure housing
- Is more than a temporary band aid solution by focusing on meeting the longer term needs of those assisted
- Distinct advantages in keeping the integrity of the private market rental intact in Australia, ensuring investor income, and debt repayments for investor loans with banks in place for 12 months.