



Australian Government

**Department of Families, Housing,
Community Services and Indigenous Affairs**

National Homelessness Research Agenda 2009 - 2013

Introduction

The White Paper on Homelessness, *The Road Home*, was released by the Australian Government on 21 December 2008. At the time, the Government announced the development of a National Homelessness Research Agenda.

This Agenda responds to the Government's commitment to improve the evidence on which our response to homelessness is based. It reflects the Government's strategic research priorities and lists key research questions for the development of the evidence base that will drive reforms.

The Australian Government has allocated \$11.4 million over the next four years to meet the priorities in the Agenda. This initial research investment balances the need for long-term research requiring detailed analysis with short-term projects that allow for innovative research proposals to emerge from a range of organisations interested in homelessness research.

PO Box 7576 Canberra Business Centre ACT 2610

Email • Facsimile • Telephone 1300 653 227

National Relay Service: TTY – 133 677, Speak and listen – 1300 555 727, Internet relay – www.relayservice.com.au
www.fahcsia.gov.au

Scope

The National Homelessness Research Agenda sets out the national priorities for research that will contribute to the whole-of-government response to homelessness. The Agenda provides a guiding framework for building a cohesive evidence base. The Agenda identifies areas that are of particular interest to the Australian Government, as well as allowing for partnership approaches to issues relevant to different jurisdictions and sectors. The research effort will supplement existing research activity and complement data improvements in progress at the Commonwealth and State/Territory levels. This includes building on the homelessness research projects undertaken by organisations such as the Australian Housing and Urban Research Institute (AHURI).

The Agenda is deliberately broad, emphasising a cross-jurisdictional approach to ensure that the response to homelessness is effective. The White Paper identifies the need for research that is broader than, but relevant to, the actions under the National Affordable Housing Agreement (NAHA) and National Partnership Agreement on Homelessness (NPAH) whereby governments work together to achieve sustainable housing and social inclusion for the homeless and those at risk of homelessness. The research effort will complement, but run separate to, the development of data that will track progress against the targets under these Agreements.

This includes the work in progress at the Commonwealth level to develop new data. The Australian Institute of Health and Welfare and the Australian Bureau of Statistics are building a new homelessness data collection to capture additional information to measure progress towards the targets. The new collection will provide an extra source of data for analysis by researchers at a later stage.

The Agenda is linked to the Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs (FaHCSIA) Research and Evaluation Plan and the research agenda for the National Framework for Protecting Australia's Children 2009-2020. Homelessness research will also inform the work of other Commonwealth agencies such as the Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations and the Department of Health and Ageing. Opportunities to link the Agenda with the Australian Government's National Research Priorities and leverage State and Territory research effort will be developed. The funding guidelines and principles also prioritise collaborative, multi-sectoral approaches to maximise the outcomes from the research investments.

Research Gaps

Existing research has been largely qualitative, small scale and sub-group specific. A number of research gaps have been identified through a literature review, a researcher roundtable, responses to the Green Paper *Which Way Home* and the White Paper, and select consultation on the draft Research Agenda. The research priorities and questions under the Agenda reflect these research gaps.

1. Data for measuring homelessness

The Agenda includes additional measures to improve the quantitative data available for research into homelessness. The evidence base is weakened by a lack of longitudinal studies and quantitative data (AHURI 2009¹). A larger scale longitudinal study would complement existing qualitative and point in time data and would potentially significantly improve the evidence base. In addition, population based research is

¹ AHURI (2009), Evidence to inform NSW homelessness action priorities 2009-10, Research Synthesis Service, May.

needed to identify the types of homelessness and measure the prevalence of homelessness. Research on socio-demographic factors, risk and protective factors, causal mechanisms, pathways and outcomes would also improve the evidence base.

2. *Service system capacity and effectiveness*

Service system research should focus on system capacity and responsiveness and needs assessment service planning at local, state and national levels. Best practice research and models of integrated service delivery should be used to inform service delivery.

The outcomes (particularly long term outcomes) for people using specialist homelessness services as well as mainstream health, housing or employment services need to be assessed. There is insufficient evidence on effective responses to clients with complex needs. Evaluation of program delivery, cost and outcomes is required in order to assess the effectiveness of interventions.

3. *Understanding of homelessness*

The impacts of early intervention and maintaining social connections and social reintegration programs are areas for further research.

In addition to identifying the issues affecting different groups within the homeless population (as listed in the White Paper), there is a gap relating to people with complex needs and homelessness including domestic violence, gambling, personality disorders, cognitive disability. There is a need for inter-sectoral research on resilience, the lifelong consequences of homelessness and intergenerational issues. Other gaps are: the geography of homelessness, in particular rural and regional homelessness, and housing options particularly for women affected by domestic violence.

The National Homelessness Research Framework

The framework outlines the strategic objectives of the Research Agenda. The purpose is to provide direction about the Government's priorities without being too prescriptive and limiting the scope for research innovation. The objectives inform the priorities and key questions to ensure that the issues affecting different groups in a range of settings are addressed in the projects funded under the Agenda. The research priorities and key questions relate to both the homeless population as a whole, as well as different disadvantaged groups within the homeless population or people who are at risk of homelessness. The research priorities are an indication of the types of research that will be needed to address the gaps identified.

The key questions are not an exhaustive list but are indicative of the types of questions that will inform the selection of research. The questions have been derived from cross referencing the priorities, gaps and initiatives implemented as a result of the White Paper. Research against these areas is required by the Government to ensure that goals and targets for homelessness are met through an efficient service system and appropriate policies.

National Homelessness Research Framework		
Aim		
To improve the evidence base for preventing and responding to homelessness		
Objectives		
Improve data and measurement of homelessness	Inform and improve the service system and practice, including evaluation	Increase our understanding of homelessness
Research Priorities		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Early measures of progress towards goals and achievements against targets • Improving data availability and frequency, including data linkage • Developing shared measures of 'homelessness' and 'at risk of homelessness' • Identifying and measuring short and long term outcomes for homeless people • Maximising the use of existing data • Improving data reporting practice 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Assessing the effectiveness of interventions, including mainstream services • Studies to improve service practice • Understanding pathways through services and identifying gaps and overlaps • Identifying the role of economic participation, education and training and community networks • Needs assessment and system capacity audits across geographic areas • Measuring short and long term outcomes for homeless people • Sustainability and exit points into stable accommodation • Engage the States and Territories and the community sector in research 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identifying the risks and causes of homelessness • Understanding how to prevent homelessness through early intervention • Identifying resilience and protective factors • Lifelong outcomes and intergenerational consequences • Predictive modelling • Policy relevant economic analyses • Build on existing knowledge and contribute to social inclusion
Key Research Questions		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What additional indicators (including sentinel indicators) are required to measure progress towards the targets? • How can estimates of homelessness be improved? • How can estimates of 'rough sleepers' be improved? • How can existing data be better utilised for homelessness research, particularly through data linkage? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What combinations of support services are effective in preventing homelessness? • How do you design integrated and cost effective service models? • What gaps exist in the service system and how can they be addressed? • How effective are specialist and mainstream services in reducing and preventing homelessness? • Which funding models achieve the best results? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What are the risk factors for homelessness and for chronic homelessness? • What makes families resilient to crises such as homelessness? • What is the relationship between family violence and homelessness? • How should the Government invest in the future needs of children to avoid the long term economic and social costs of homelessness? • What are the costs of not intervening early?

Key Research Questions (continued)

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What are the geospatial dimensions of homelessness? Do they vary for different demographic groups? • What longitudinal data is required to understand the dynamics of homelessness? • How is the composition of the homeless population changing? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What models improve employment and education outcomes for homeless people? • What factors impact on the capacity of the workforce to deliver quality services? • What are the short and long term outcomes from interventions including health, housing, employment and education? • What are promising models for providing and sustaining stable housing to the homeless? • How effective are the White Paper strategies in reducing homelessness? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What is the intergenerational impact of unstable housing and homelessness? • What are the lifelong consequences and costs of homelessness? • Which neighbourhoods have the highest risk of homelessness as a result of changes in the local housing and economic environments? • Who will be homeless in 5, 10 or 20 years?
---	--	--

Outcomes

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Address the limitations of the evidence base in order to get better outcomes for homeless people from the services delivered and better understand the drivers of homelessness • Capture and improve comprehensive data and create a legacy investment in longitudinal unit record data 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Understand the impacts of service design and social policy on homelessness within and across Commonwealth, State and Territory jurisdictions to drive better performance from the service system; • Practice focussed research to improve service responses and evaluate the effectiveness of programs • Collaborative ventures to build cross disciplinary capability 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Research that will impact on policy and the Government's broader social inclusion agenda • A good mix of forward looking and evaluative research • Identify emerging issues and develop innovative responses
--	--	--

A robust and reliable evidence base that identifies:

- the extent and nature of homelessness for a range of disadvantaged groups as well as the homeless and at risk populations as a whole in different settings;
- the pathways in and out of homelessness; and
- effective ways for responding to homelessness.

Improved cross-disciplinary capability in homelessness research to inform policy and practice.

Implementation

The Australian Government will invest \$11.4 million over four years in homelessness research. The Agenda will be implemented through a range of activities:

- Research Partnership Agreements;
- Research Projects; and
- Research capacity building and dissemination.

The critical need for longitudinal data development and evaluation of the White Paper will be addressed through separately commissioned projects. The two projects will be scoped to take into account the funded research activities and work already in progress.

Research Partnership Agreements are a limited number of substantial multi-year partnerships delivering an agreed program of research. These Agreements are designed to answer research questions that are complex and/or longitudinal in nature and require a long term funding commitment. Research Partnership Agreements are funded via a competitive funding process and are developed collaboratively with FaHCSIA. Organisations must have the capacity to undertake and manage a significant program of research.

Research Projects are an important bottom-up approach to give the capacity to respond to emerging priorities, encourage innovation and leverage external funding. Projects are of national significance and will focus on the priorities in the National Research Agenda. They are funded through competitive funding rounds and are open to a broad range of researchers including those in the community sector. Research projects may vary in length from a few weeks to a few years and range across discrete secondary data analysis to significant primary data collection exercises. As well as policy relevant research, the Agenda will sponsor practice focussed research to improve service responses and evaluate the effectiveness of programs.

Research capacity building aims to develop the skills and resources of the homeless and the broader social policy research community in Australia. The emphasis on cross sectoral and multi-disciplinary approaches within the Partnership Agreements and Research Projects as well as the availability of new data for analysis will build capacity.

Research dissemination is central to the aims of the Research Agenda to providing an evidence base. Reports from Research Partnership Agreements and research projects will be published and widely communicated. Clearinghouse arrangements are an important means for meeting the information and evidence needs of policy makers. Seminars and conferences are also supported by the Agenda.

Homelessness Research Reference Group

A Reference Group will be established to provide strategic advice on the research priorities and questions, as well as research design and methods. A range of stakeholders will be invited to participate in the Reference Group.

Principles

Funding will be allocated in accordance with the following principles.

1. A strategic approach

Research activities will target the objectives in the Agenda. A focus will be on using and building on existing research and data. The Agenda will take into account the spread of projects across multi-site and multi-jurisdictional areas and targeting of different disadvantaged groups and geographical areas. It also includes addressing practice issues and policy implications and developing innovative approaches that meet an identified research gap.

2. Research will be of high quality and credible

Research should be robust, independent and have credibility. The commissioning of research and the process of investing in research should be transparent. Research will include a mix of methods (quantitative and qualitative) determined by the research questions. Ethical considerations for working with vulnerable groups will be incorporated into the research design.

3. Existing datasets should be used wherever possible

Some of the research will involve the development of new datasets. Existing datasets, including those developed by FaHCSIA, the Australian Bureau of Statistics and Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, provide a potentially valuable resource for researchers. This includes FaHCSIA investments in large collections such as the Household, Income and Labour Dynamics in Australia (HILDA) survey, the Growing up in Australia: The Longitudinal Study of Australian Children (LSAC) and Footprints in Time: The Longitudinal Study of Indigenous Children (LSIC).

4. The findings of the research will be accessible to a range of stakeholders

The research will be widely shared and disseminated. Research reports will be available to other researchers and across Governments and the community sector.

5. Research will be conducted within agreed timelines

Research proposals will need to meet agreed timelines and reporting requirements. The research program will be rolled out progressively with activities building on the outcomes of previous research.

6. Research investments will be based on value for money and relevance

Emphasis will be on maximising research activities and minimising administrative costs. Research investments will emphasize collaboration and partnerships that leverage new resources, networks and skills. Priority will be given to research that has direct relevance to policy and improving the service system.

Further Information:

Research and Information Section
Department of Families, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs
PO Box 7576 Canberra Business Centre ACT 2610
Ph 02 6244 1487 / Fax 02 6244 7909
Email: Homelessness.research@fahcsia.gov.au