



# Interim Submission

## Directions Paper for the 10-Year Strategy on Homelessness

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## 1.0 Introduction

The Western Australian Local Government Association (WALGA) is the united voice of Local Government in Western Australia. The Association is an independent, membership-based group representing and supporting the work and interests of 138 Local Governments in Western Australia.

The Association provides an essential voice for 1,222 Elected Members and approximately 15,000 Local Government employees as well as over 2 million constituents of Local Governments in Western Australia. The Association also provides professional advice and offers services that provide financial benefits to the Local Governments and the communities they serve.

## 2.0 General Comments

The Association appreciates the opportunity to respond to the Directions Paper for the 10-Year Strategy on Homelessness (Directions Paper), and further has valued the opportunity to contribute to the development of the Strategy through officer representation on the Supporting Communities Forum Homelessness Working Group (Working Group) which aims to deliver a whole of community Strategy that:

- Is responsive to the feedback received from communities across regional and metropolitan Western Australia
- Defines the role of and sets out clear actions for State Government agencies, Local Government, business and the community sector to help address and prevent homelessness, and
- Puts Western Australia on the path to ending – not managing – homelessness.

The Association is generally satisfied with the content and direction of the Directions Paper and ultimately the State Strategy.

The Association further acknowledges that *‘despite this slight decrease in the overall homeless population in Western Australia, there has been a rise in the most visible and acute form of homelessness since the 2011 Census – rough sleeping’* and with this visibility the expectation of the community that ‘something’ has to be done to address the issue of homelessness by ‘someone’. Given this, clear delineation of roles and responsibilities becomes increasingly important for the Local Government sector and the communities they serve.

This submission responds in a positive manner however advocates for early communication to Local Government of any roles or responsibilities that may be considered appropriate for the sector albeit it is acknowledged none are envisaged at this stage.

The Association recognises that Local Government through its planning, health, community development and regulatory powers can **facilitate** positive local and regional responses to end homelessness, however does not see that it has a lead role rather one of a stakeholder that requires early engagement in the understanding of collaborative approaches that improve the quality of life for people experiencing homelessness in all of its manifestations.

The Association agrees with the Directions Paper that *'Homelessness looks different across Western Australia'* including *'rough sleepers tend to congregate around the inner-city, where most services and emergency accommodation are located, while overcrowding is highest in the north of the state'*. Therefore the responses to homelessness and the level of direct involvement by Local Government will differ across the State, and will be guided by the individual circumstance and priorities that each community desires.

### 3.0 Response to Specific Questions

The Directions Paper requests feedback to a set of specific questions. The Association provides the following in response.

#### 1. What is the best way to provide advice to Government on emerging issues and trends on homelessness over the life of the Strategy?

The recently released Regional Homelessness Plan 2018/19 – 2021 / 22 <https://www.joondalup.wa.gov.au/wp-content/uploads/2019/03/Regional-Homlessness-Plan-Final-for-Web.pdf> developed by the Cities of Joondalup and Wanneroo provides excellent guidance in their Action Plan under Pillar 1: Building Capacity, Understanding and Engagement, in particular:

Strategy 1.1 Maintain a formalised interagency network of stakeholders in the northern suburbs to ensure the sector works effectively, efficiently and collaboratively.

This strategy, along with a Communication Strategy that provides a conduit to Government, could indeed be expanded to a whole of metropolitan / State approach to ensure ongoing and relevant advice is provide directly to Government.

Responses from the Local Government sector further provided:

Create regional taskforces or working groups to start collectively discussing homelessness with a regional focus i.e. Pilbara Department of Communities consider a collective impact approach to address homelessness in which Communities would be the backbone organisation. Additionally having a strong Aboriginal representation in the governance groups by utilising current Aboriginal Leadership groups such as Hedland Aboriginal Strong Leaders and Pilbara Aboriginal Voices (PAV). A strong governance structure would inform State Government on regional issues.

#### 2. How can the Strategy help stakeholders and services in your area to collaborate and work together?

One of the main deliverables of the Working Group for the Strategy has been to define the role of and set out clear actions for State Government agencies, Local Government, business and the community sector to help address and prevent homelessness. These clear roles and actions, particularly those for Local Government will assist in providing guidance for Association members as to the level of engagement they will have with service provision or otherwise based on the needs of their individual communities.

By way of example the Cities of Wanneroo and Joondalup Regional Homelessness Plan Action Plan is based on three pillars:

- Building capacity, understanding and engagement
- Prevention, and early intervention, and
- Responding to homelessness.

This Strategy could be used as a guide and built upon by other Local Governments, in particular as referred to in Question 1 the reference to Strategy 1.1 of the Regional Homelessness Plan.

Responses from the Local Government sector further provided:

It would provide a framework to approach homelessness but if there is no backbone organisation taking lead of this strategy from a region or local level then services will continue to work in silos and not in partnership.

### **3. How can the Strategy support better data collection on outcomes for individuals?**

The Association asserts that data collection on individuals may well be included via the Procurement process as a Key Performance Indicator for Service Providers when tendering.

The Regional Plan developed by the Cities of Joondalup and Wanneroo again provides guidance in their Action Plan under Pillar 1: Building Capacity, Understanding and Engagement, in particular:

Strategy 1.2 Ensure relevant, accurate and consistent data is collected and made available in the northern suburbs to inform sound decision making by stakeholders.

It should be noted that the Regional Plan refers to a broad stakeholder group therefore this Strategy does not necessary infer that Local Government would collect this data, rather that appropriate agencies with capability and capacity to do so collect and further provide this information to those in decision making roles, one of which could be Local Government.

Further, commitment to an Outcomes Framework that is clearly understood by all with a stake in contributing to and supporting this Strategy. By way of example the Association refers to the Outcomes Measurement Framework currently under development and refinement as part of the Supporting Communities Forum Outcomes Framework Working Group.

Responses from the Local Government sector further provided:

Provide the regions with clear and consistent indicators. Regional settings would have different indicators and outputs to Metropolitan areas due to limited service provisions. Change contracts of homelessness service providers to outcome based KPI's and not rely solely on client access to service numbers.

#### **4. Are these the vision, principles and focus areas that you would like to see in the Strategy?**

The Association is supportive of the Vision:

*'Everyone has a place to call home and is supported to achieve stable and independent lives.'*

Principles:

- 1. Ending homelessness is everyone's responsibility*
- 2. Housing is a foundation for life*
- 3. People's needs are at the heart of our responses*
- 4. There is a no wrong door approach to service delivery*
- 5. The right solutions are delivered in the right places*
- 6. We do what we know works*
- 7. We hold ourselves accountable for achieving outcomes.*

and Focus areas:

- 1. Creating sustainable pathways out of homelessness*
- 2. Prevention and early intervention*
- 3. Transforming the existing homelessness service system to create an integrated, person-centred system.*

however would strongly reiterate that any proposed role for Local Government is clearly articulated and that the sector is involved in determining that role in collaboration with State Government and key stakeholders.

Responses from the Local Government sector further provided:

It is a starting point and provides a framework to navigate the strategy over the next ten years. A system change needs to occur which is outlined in the strategy. Information sharing is an issue and community members can be over-serviced, hence why a wrap-a-round case worker would be beneficial to homelessness services already funded. These strategies are huge for regional services as there is limited resources in communities, especially the Pilbara.

#### **5. What actions would you like implemented as a priority under each focus area in the Strategy?**

##### **Focus Area 1: Sustainable pathways out of homelessness**

Ensure that Local Government is involved at the decision making table particularly around planning for trialling different types of housing and accommodation.

Responses from the Local Government sector further provided:

Direction 1.3: Improve service delivery through innovation and collaboration

## Focus Area 2: Prevention and early intervention

Ensure that Local Governments have the capacity along with other service providers, to guide those in crisis to appropriate support mechanisms.

Responses from the Local Government sector further provided:

Direction 2.1: Focus on families and young people to break cycles of homelessness

## Focus Area 3: System transformation

Ensure where whole of government responses to homelessness are implemented that Local Government is included and supported to the appropriateness of its role.

Responses from the Local Government sector further provided:

Direction 3.2: Implement integrated, whole-of-government responses to homelessness

### 6. Are there any cohorts that are missing?

Responses from the Local Government sector suggested:

Heavy focus on Aboriginal representation in all levels of engagement and governance, especially addressing over-crowding issues.

## 4.0 Conclusion

The Association has valued being involved in the development of the State Homelessness Strategy to date and appreciates the collaborative nature of the work that has gone into the Directions Paper.

Reference has been made in this submission to the Regional Homelessness Plan developed by the Cities of Joondalup and Wanneroo therefore it is appropriate to conclude with the following drawn from their Plan:

*'Given that there is no sole sphere of Government or service provider that has capacity to address every contributing factor to homelessness, it is critical that a whole of community and commitment to an inter-agency approach to a common outcome is secured. This sharing of resources, knowledge and programming can maximise the provision of services available to support a community and in doing so, take meaningful strides to sustain an improved quality of life for people experiencing homelessness.'*

*Local Government is largely considered to be the sphere of government closest to the people, responsible for the wellbeing of communities through the provision of infrastructure, services and regulation. Whilst there is no specific mandate for Local Government to play a major role in addressing homelessness, Local Government through its planning, health, community development and regulatory powers can **facilitate** positive local and regional responses to end homelessness.'*

And finally from the Local Government sector:

*‘that the implementation of such a strategy must be matched with adequate funding to have the desired result and community impact’.*

***Note: This submission should be viewed as an interim submission as it has not had the opportunity to go through the WALGA State-wide Zone and State Council process. This process will be completed by the WALGA State Council meeting of 3 July 2019 at which time the Association reserves the right to submit further comments from the sector.***