The HREOC report in 1989, led to increased supported accommodation for young people and the IHS HY health initiative (approx $4.4 million annually) as well as employment and training support in the form of JPET ($19.9 million annually in 2005-6). However since the mid-nineties, there has been a stagnation of funding in real terms for areas such as supported accommodation (ie. SAAP) and over a long period of time, for public and community housing. The major new national initiative has been at the front end of early intervention with the Commonwealth Reconnect program ($20 million annually). A second early intervention initiative by the Commonwealth was the small Family Homelessness Prevention Pilot Program. It commenced in 2001 and continued under a different name but with no increase beyond the eight agencies until 2008 ($2.6 million annually). There have been several significant youth homelessness and early intervention initiatives by various states such as Victoria with the School Focused Youth Service, the Family Reconciliation and Mediation Program and YEETI. In Queensland there is the Youth Support Coordinators initiative ($8 million annually).
Chapter 2 | Government responses since Burdekin

Background

2.1 During the post-war period and up to the mid-seventies assistance to homeless people was primarily delivered by charitable and church groups. Even during the 1950s and 1960s when there was full-employment, there were groups of people, who were homeless. People with serious mental illnesses would be committed to mental institutions while other people with borderline conditions would be found in the homeless population. Homeless people, including some younger people, tended to suffer alcohol related issues.

2.2 In 1974, the Homeless Persons’ Assistance Act passed by the Commonwealth Government provided government funds for some centres in the capital cities that provided accommodation and assistance for homeless people.

2.3 In 1979 and 1980 several reports appeared that pointed out that agencies were increasingly encountering young people amongst the homeless. A Senate Standing Committee on Youth Homelessness in 1982 opened the way for a consolidated program known as the Supported Accommodation and Assistance Program or SAAP in 1985. Youth SAAP services are a part of the overall program.

2.4 The purpose of this brief review of government responses to youth homelessness is to map the policy landscape broadly, to acknowledge the major initiatives but not list every pilot project that has ever been launched. All states and territories participate in SAAP, which commenced prior to Burdekin, although there was an expansion of supported accommodation for young people in the early nineties. All states and territories have youth policies and implement these policies in various ways. It can be argued that homeless youth people will benefit to some extent, although to what extent is not known.
Commonwealth Government

2.5 Following the Burdekin report of 1989, and amid a great deal of publicity and public interest, the Federal government announced $100m over four years for a Youth Social Justice Package for Young Australians.

More than half of the expenditure will directly assist homeless young people through a doubling of accommodation capacity, substantial improvements in the Youth Homeless Allowance (YHA) and better health services… they represent a significant response to the issues raised by the recent Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission report …(quoted in National Clearinghouse for Youth Studies, 1989, p.41)

As part of this funding, the Innovative Health Services for Homeless Youth (IHS HY) was established as a joint Commonwealth and state and territory government program response to the Burdekin Report. It promoted a diverse range of youth health projects in 1991 with the aim ‘to improve the health outcomes of homeless and otherwise at-risk youth aged 12-24 years and their dependents through the provision of specialised health services and improved access to mainstream health services’.

2.6 In 1992, the Job Placement, Employment and Training Program (JPET) was established as a pilot program as part of the National Employment and Training program, designed to assist and support 15-19 year olds at risk of long term homelessness, unemployment and poverty. In 1995, JPET was discontinued but then it was announced in the 1996-97 Federal budget that the program would be re-established and it recommenced operations in January 1997. Since 2006, JPET has been managed by the Department of Employment and Workplace Relations (DEWR), but it has been reformed administratively to be more in line with DEWR’s employment-focused outcomes.

2.7 The change of government saw the termination of the Students At Risk (STAR) program that had been a component of the Social Justice Strategy. However, a Prime Minister’s Youth Homeless Taskforce chaired by Major David Eldridge initiated a pilot scheme of 26 projects to investigate the best way to prevent homelessness for young people. The report of the taskforce, Putting Families in the Picture, followed an evaluation of the pilot program. A recurrently funded early intervention program Reconnect was launched in 1998 ‘to improve the level of engagement of homeless young people or those at risk of homelessness with their families, work, education, training and the community’. The initial budget allocation was $60 million over four years.

New South Wales

2.8 In New South Wales, SAAP comprises the main state response to homelessness. The NSW Partnership against Homelessness (PAH) set up in 1999 brought together twelve departments to contribute to a cross-departmental work plan that was directed to improving state-wide and cross agency coordination of responses to homelessness. At the time this report was published, a fully-worked out state plan of action had not been completed, but some work has begun to this end. However, an Inner City Homelessness Action Plan Phase 2 – 2007-2011 was launched in August 2007, which focused on
rough sleepers in the inner city, inter-agency collaboration between agencies in the inner city, continued priorities from Phase 1 and a long-term vision to ‘end homelessness in inner city Sydney.

2.9 New South Wales has developed the NSW Housing and Human Services Accord, in collaboration with other government and non-government agencies, to meet the government’s commitment to assist people with complex housing needs. The Accord is a framework for cross-agency housing and support agreements to assist social housing applicants and existing tenants with high and complex needs to obtain the support they require to sustain their tenancies. Some new service models are being trialled under the Accord, eg, the Department of Housing has entered into an agreement with the Department of Community Services (DOCs) to provide housing and support, using public housing properties for up to 12 young people leaving out-of-home care in the Newcastle/Maitland area. A worker from DOCS assesses the level of client support needs and then ensures support is delivered to these young people for an agreed period. Another example, is a project that assists young people with an intellectual disability to leave out-of-home care. Similarly a third pilot provides stable housing and support for young people moving out of the juvenile justice system to independent living.

2.10 The PAH recognises young people as a group at-risk of homelessness. A notable single project was the Miller Live ‘N’ Learn program a foyer-type accommodation setting for young people which was originally an idea proposed by the Youth Accommodation Coalition. The project attracted union and foundation support, and the Department of Housing provided much of the funding and acted as lead agency. The campus was established in 2002. Some supplementary initiatives directed specifically to young people are the NSW Housing Youth Scholarships, which provided funds of $2000 for 100 disadvantaged young people in social housing to continue in school until Year 12.

Victoria

2.11 A major Victorian initiative has been the Victorian Homelessness Strategy (VHS), which has sought to provide a whole of government framework for addressing homelessness in Victorian in 2000.

2.12 A focus on new models of services for young people was developed through the Youth Homelessness Action Plan Stages 1 and 2. Along similar lines to the underpinning goal of Reconnect, a Family Reconciliation and Mediation Program was launched for homeless young people who have been homeless for some time. The central provider Melbourne City Mission provides brokerage funds to SAAP or THM services to provide brief counselling and other appropriate family interventions. A second initiative known as the Youth Education, Employment and Training initiative provides brokerage funding that can be accessed through SAAP or Transitional Housing Management (THM) services to support homeless young people to access education, employment and training services and opportunities in some ways similar to JPET-type support. Stage 2 of the Youth Homelessness Action Plan has received $7.5m over four years in addition to capital funds of $6.3m.

2.13 The YHAP Stage 2, ‘Creating Connections’ was launched in 2006 underpinned
by $28.7 million over four years from 2006-2010 and defined its strategic approach in
terms of four key directions – early intervention and interdependence, individualised
accommodation and housing support options, greater access to complementary services
and enhancement of the homelessness service system - and 10 actions whereby the main
objectives will be implemented. These actions were: the creation of youth hubs with
accommodation linked to regional hubs; assistance for young people entering the private
rental market; intensive case management for young people with high and complex needs;
youth-focused placement; 24 hour response for youth refuges; continuing the initiatives
under YHAP 1; the introduction of new models of practice; and the development of
service system capacity through better coordination, workforce development and the
assessment and accreditation of homelessness services.

2.14 The School Focused Youth Service (SFYS) has been on the ground since 1997
following the Youth Suicide Prevention Taskforce. The model was developed for youth
at risk of homelessness but the role of the SFYS is the coordination of prevention and
early intervention strategies for at-risk youth aged 10 to 18 years of age by facilitating
cooperative work by schools and community agencies. Supplementary brokerage funds
have been added to this effort from the Office for Children.

2.15 The establishment of an Office for Child Safety headed by Commissioner
Bernie Geary has strengthened the oversight of child-care and protection in Victoria.

Queensland

2.16 Queensland has developed a Responding to Homeless strategy, which received
$235.52m over four years, including SAAP. Specifically for homeless young people was
$4.55 million for the Addressing Volatile Substances Misuse initiative. The additional
funds have underwritten a number of initiatives such as a 24 hour free information and
referral service, integrated Homelessness Health Response teams in Brisbane, the Gold
Coast, Townsville and Cairns, a Homeless persons Court Diversion Program beginning
in 2006 to direct homeless people brought before courts for minor offences to the
appropriate support services.

2.17 The Inquiry received a submission from the Queensland Department of
education, Training and the Arts. The Queensland Government’s Education and
training reforms for the Future commenced in 2002 represented some major changes
in education with some measures directed specifically to at-risk and homeless young
people. The option of flexible arrangements for schooling is particularly useful for at-risk
or homeless students. Under the Flexible Learning Services (FLS) program, funding of
$2.0 million per year provides for the purchase of effective curriculum, delivery strategies
and human resources to support disengaged 15–17 year old young people’s individual
learning pathways. District Youth Achievement Plans (DYAP) are a local plan of action
to assist young people, especially those aged 15–17 years, to reach their education and
career goals. The main aim of a DYAP is the coordination of programs and services
for young people at the local level, for both state and non-state schools, and including
vocational education and training providers and other services.

2.18 Another relevant program is the Access to Pathways grants program ($5.9
million per year) supports community initiatives by providing funding to improve participation, retention and attainment for 15–17 year olds at risk of disengaging from learning. These funds provide direct support to young people via the delivery of additional education programs to ‘at risk’ 15–17 year old youth and also support locally defined activities local priorities, as determined in District Youth Achievement Plans.

2.19 A notable innovation is the Youth Support Coordinators initiative that deploys 113 workers throughout the state to provide for prevention and early intervention for at risk youth to avoid homelessness and premature school leaving. The program commenced in the late nineties and was expanded from a network of 34 coordinators to 100 following the positive 1999 evaluation. The YSC program will receive funding of $32m over four years from 2005 to 2010.

2.20 There are 100 community education counsellors who work closely with their local communities and the school guidance officers to support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students. The Get Set for Work initiative provides employment and training assistance through local organisations to help young people aged 15–17 years to prepare for employment.

2.21 Lastly, the Home School Linkage Project provides specialised advice on the development and implementation of resources to achieve better understanding and awareness between schools and local Indigenous communities.

South Australia

2.22 South Australia’s creation of a Social Inclusion Unit attached to the Department of Premier and Cabinet was modelled on the Blair Government’s Social Exclusion Unit approach. Homelessness including youth homelessness was raised as a high priority and $23m committed over five years for initiatives to reduce the number of people experiencing homelessness. Three initiatives funded were:

2.23 Support for Homeless Students - a service network to support homeless students, which included phone support and advice for students and counsellors at DECS and TAFE, and support packages for students and families in a case management context.

2.24 Supported Tenancies Program (STP) - a program designed to assist vulnerable individuals and families at risk of eviction in the public housing sector to access support services for maintaining a tenancy and to prevent homelessness.

2.25 Private Rental Liaison Program (PRLP) - where specific workers located within Housing SA are employed to link people on low incomes with landlords and real estate agents with rental vacancies. 2006-2007 figures show that 96 out of 323 people assisted, or 30 per cent of those housed in the private rental market, were under the age of 25. The Private Rental Liaison Officer also has the capacity to support individuals in private rental tenancies for 6 months after allocation.

2.26 The South Australia Government’s Thinker’s in Residence program in 2006 brought Ms Roseanne Haggerty from Common Ground in New York to Adelaide with
a view to developing a systemic response to homelessness in South Australia. Several developments in the City of Adelaide have been informed by models derived from Ms Haggerty’s work in New York.

**Western Australia**

2.27 The Western Australian Government established the State Homelessness Taskforce in July 2001 to develop a State Homelessness Strategy. The Taskforce report was followed in May 2002 with $32 million funding for various initiatives envisaged under the strategy. A Homeless Helpline was established, three new crisis accommodation services, two specifically for youth – one in Fremantle and other in Broome. Five youth accommodation services were funded to teach parenting skills to homeless young parents and to support them. A total of $400,000 was spent on counselling for children in families who experience homelessness. Seventeen rural and remote women’s refuges were funded to employ a child support worker. Three new services were funded to undertake leaving care support. The Street Doctor program has been continued and expanded. The WA component of Innovative Health Services for Homeless Youth has been particularly active, developing several new models that have been highly successful.

2.28 New funding was invested in accommodation for the homeless. In May 2006, the Western Australian Government provided some additional funds for SAAP – an additional $1.25 million per year and in 2005-06 the Government applied a more generous indexation to the state component of SAAP at a cost of $1.5 million, the first real increase in funding since 1998-99. The WA submission observed: ‘adequate funding is critical to the ongoing capacity of YSAAP services to continue to respond to the needs of homeless young people however, the Australian Government has not provided any additional funding for viability issues of SAAP services’.

2.29 The Department of Community Development has provided $3.5 million over fours years to assist young people in private rental to avoid homelessness and maintain their tenancies. This initiative is in line with some similar recommendations in this report. Some $115,000 per year has been provided to the Youth Legal Service and Mission Australia to provide financial counselling services for young people.

2.30 The gap between the supply and demand for housing in Western Australia is acute. The Government has committed $104 million towards social housing over and above the State Government’s obligations under the Commonwealth-State Housing Agreement to create 1000 new dwellings. One of the initiatives that the Department of Housing under the homelessness strategy has been the building of appropriate one and two bedroom units to cater for the needs of singles including youth. Measures have also been taken to increase bond assistance in line with market increases. In 2005-06, several new shot-term youth accommodation units were built in Geraldton, East Victoria Park, Bunbury, Balcatta, Kelmscott and Basseldean.

2.31 In 2003, an evaluation of the Government’s initiatives under the Homelessness Strategy had been ‘satisfactory’ and ‘timely’ but also sounded a warning that ‘the major concern of stakeholders is that Government will be seen to have done something with these initiatives and the focus will be removed from the area. With so much left to do it
is hoped that this is just the start of an on-going commitment by Government, to solving the problem. The WA Homelessness Strategy as such concluded in 2006.

**Tasmania**

2.32 Tasmania is a small jurisdiction heavily reliant on its funding for SAAP and housing under the Commonwealth-States Housing Agreement. A notable Tasmania initiative undertaken in 2003 was the commissioning of a discussion paper ‘Homelessness and a Whole of Government Approach,’ from the University of Tasmania. The paper raised a series of characteristics of a ‘whole of government approach’ including: cooperative relationships such as across government and community organisations, a higher profile for homelessness as an issue in the community, minimised duplication and attention to service gaps, consistent data collection strategies, consultation with stakeholders, planned approach to supporting homeless people with complex needs, and minimising the social, economic and individual costs of homelessness. A subsequent document outlined the framework for the provision of homelessness services in Tasmania.

2.33 A range of initiatives in the child-care and protection area as preventative measures such as Leaving Care programs, the Relative Care Assistance Program, Child Health and Parenting Services, and Preventative Case Management Services. The ‘Report on Child Protection Services in Tasmania 2006’ has recommended a number of legislative amendments to the Children, Young Persons and Their Families Act and these were being followed up at the time of this report. One amendment details the responsibility of the Department of Health and Human Services to assist young adults who have been in out of home care until the age of 21.

2.34 Since the mid-nineties, Tasmania has been active on the early intervention front. The social workers in senior colleges have been a particularly active network supporting students at-risk and those who become homeless. Some colleges such as Hobart College employ a youth worker as well. There are Youth Learning Officers who work with at-risk students to assist their transition to employment or further education and training. Alternative education programs exist in Launceston, Hobart and the North-West for 13-18 year old students ‘not suited’ to mainstream schooling.

**Northern Territory**

2.35 The Northern Territory is a small jurisdiction heavily dependent on Commonwealth funding for programs and initiatives. Apart from SAAP, there have been a number of other initiatives to improve the safety of Indigenous women and young people on the streets and in transit between communities and the town centres.

2.36 One such service is Youth Beat in Darwin and Palmerston, which is funded by the Department of Health and Community Services. This initiative provides outreach support to young people on the streets at night, with aims to:

- Improve the safety of young people at night, including diverting them from risky behaviour and crime
- Engage, rather than marginalise young people
- Link young people to family, community education and recreation through mentoring and referral
- Support families to care for, and take responsibility for their children

2.37 In Darwin, the Darwin Transport and Return to Home Services funded by the Department of Justice provide a diverse range of services for the Larrakia Community. In Alice Springs, the Youth Drop-in Centre and Support Services opens from 9pm to 1am to help young people find safe overnight shelter and provides case work support. This service works in conjunction with the Youth Night Patrol operated by Tangentyre Council.

2.38 The Safe Families Program in Alice Springs, jointly funded by the NT Government DHCS and FaHCSIA under the Indigenous Family Violence Partnerships Agreement has three components:
- Two independent living houses for families or young people in crisis;
- Accommodation for 7-14 year old Indigenous young people who have experienced family breakdown;
- Family workers connecting young people back to their families and communities.

In some respects this initiative incorporates elements of the Reconnect model, but with a strong emphasis on working with extended Indigenous families.

2.39 There has been a concern about the lower school achievement of Indigenous young people and there are education projects for at-risk Indigenous young people such as the Wilowra Youth Program and the The Irkerlantye Learning Centre, an Alice Springs based Eastern/Central Arrernte Education and Community Development Program that grew out of an alternative secondary school for at-risk Indigenous children from the Alice Springs Town Camps.

2.40 Family violence and its consequences is a major concern directly contributing to homelessness. The Peace at Home Project is a joint NT and Commonwealth Government project that started in Katherine in 2006 to address the complex of issues associated with domestic and family violence. Cross-agency and cross-department Integrated Service Response Teams provide case management for families experiencing high levels of family violence and child abuse. The project is based in Katherine Region but also services outlying communities.

2.41 The recent involvement of the Commonwealth on Indigenous care and protection issues in NT Indigenous communities has attracted public criticism on a number of grounds, but it did represent a major Federal commitment to Indigenous communities, with significant funds for services, community building and housing to be forthcoming. The new Federal Government has begun to make certain changes, but it has reiterated a Commonwealth commitment to undertake a major long-term effort to redress the endemic issues of Indigenous communities in the Northern Territory. Depending on what happens, potentially, these measures will have a significant impact on Indigenous youth homelessness in the Territory.
Australian Capital Territory

2.42 The Australian Capital Territory government did not provide a submission to the Inquiry. However, the issue of homelessness has been prominent in this small jurisdiction. In June 2002, the ACT Government commissioned ACTCOSS to undertake a comprehensive needs analysis of homelessness in the ACT. The main consequential response by Government was the development of an ACT Homelessness Strategy. As a part of the process of developing the ACT homelessness strategy, a Review of YSAAP was undertaken beginning late in 2003, followed by a consultation by the ACT Youth Coalition.

2.43 Breaking the Cycle: the ACT Homelessness Strategy was published in November 2003. Under this broader framework, a Youth Homelessness Action Plan was developed by the Youth Homelessness Working Group and the Youth Policy Forum, for implementation in 2007. Sector development comprised a major emphasis: new protocol between SAAP services and Child Protection, training on the protocol, a quarterly youth homelessness forum, early intervention and prevention fact sheets, development and implementation of a brokerage support model for ‘couch-surfing’, working with youth training. Five Housing ACT properties were trialled for share household arrangements for young people. Some attention has been accorded to working with parents and families in the form of the Raja Service and the Canberra Fathers and Children’s Service in addition to earlier initiatives.

2.44 The first progress report presented to the ACT Government in November 2005 acknowledged that ‘the majority of actions in the Strategy seek to implement and achieve reform of the service system’. In the second progress report, 41 of the original 82 actions were recorded as completed leaving 26 consolidated actions for attention in the final year of the strategy.

Summary

2.45 Broadly across the twenty years since the Burdekin Report the picture is one of considerable innovation but funding stagnation and no-growth particularly in supported accommodation (ie. SAAP) and public and community housing. There was an expansion of youth SAAP capacity following the HREOC report. The major new initiatives have been at the front end of early intervention with the Commonwealth Reconnect program ($20 million per year). A second early intervention initiative by the Commonwealth was the Family Homelessness Prevention Pilot Program, which commenced in 2001 with $5 million of funding over three years for eight services one in each jurisdiction. Despite a positive evaluation in 2002-03, the program involving the same eight agencies, was renamed the HOME Advice program and supported for a further four years. This early intervention initiative is not a youth program as such but assisted 3,438 children. Given that some 55,000 children pass through SAAP services each year, it represents an important but small response for children.

2.46 Public and community housing funding has remain relatively static since the Burdekin Report and the additional supported accommodation for young people that also followed the report was the last major injection of growth funds into SAAP, which thereafter, increased but at a rate less than the rise in real costs. The Government
submissions and other documents record a good deal of creative activity, innovation and pilot projects, but only a modest capacity to substantially add to range of services for homeless young people beyond what is possible with the funds under the SAAP agreement.

2.47 The most notable initiatives have been the development of strategic approaches to homelessness in Victoria, Western Australia and Queensland and the ACT, and the priority given to homelessness by the South Australian Social Inclusion Unit. These efforts have represented an attempt to make strategies more explicit and to do forward planning. New money has been invested by state governments to enhance their homelessness service systems. Some funds have increased the capacity of the system to provide additional accommodation, but state and territory funds have been limited. As a foundation program, SAAP, has not been funded in line with increasing real costs for more than a decade. Likewise, Funding for public and community housing has been constrained over a long period. Several state submissions made these same points.

2.48 The state and territory initiatives to develop more systematic and broad-based strategies for responding to homelessness have been engines for innovation and some additional new funds. The policy documents have generally reflected ambitions to construct ‘whole of government’ responses, but collaborations with the Commonwealth Government have been somewhat restricted over the past decade and significant resources that might be possible under a full national approach have not been available. Also, when reading some of the policy documents, phrases such as ‘the final period of the strategy’ suggest that the strategies are time-limited and not long-term, even though the new initiatives created will continue recurrently.

ENDNOTES

4 Submission 91, A submission from the New South Wales Department of Housing.
6 Submission 39, A submission from the Office of Housing, Department of Human Services, written in consultation with the Office for Children (DHS).
7 Submission 77, A submission from the Department of Education, Training and the Arts.
8 The Inquiry received submissions from the South Australian Department for Families and Communities (Submission 17, Part 1), the Office for Youth (a division of the Department of Further Education, Employment, Science and Technology) (Submission 17 Part 2), and the Ministers Youth Council (Office for Youth) (Submission 57).
9 Submission 56, A submission from the Department of Housing and Works, the Department for Child Protection; Submission 82, A submission from the Department for Child Protection, and Submission 48 from the Department of health, Child and Adolescent Health Service.
10 Submission 82, Department of Child Protection, p.2.
12 Submission 69, A submission from the Tasmanian Government.
15 Submission 80, A submission from the Northern Territory Government, combined department submission prepared by the Family and Children's Services Branch of the Department of Health and Community Services.