



Inquiry into the Financial Administration of Homelessness Services in Western Australia

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Our commitment to inclusion

The Salvation Army Australia acknowledges the Traditional Owners of the land on which we meet and work and pay our respect to Elders, past, present and future.

We value people of all cultures, languages, capacities, sexual orientations, gender identities and/or expressions. We are committed to providing programs that are fully inclusive. We are committed to the safety and wellbeing of people of all ages, particularly children.

Our values are:

- Integrity
- Compassion
- Respect
- Diversity
- Collaboration

Learn more about our commitment to inclusion:

salvationarmy.org.au/about-us

The Salvation Army is an international movement and our mission is to preach the gospel of Jesus Christ and to meet human needs in his name without discrimination.





Introduction

The Salvation Army thanks the Western Australian Government for the opportunity to share our feedback and service delivery experience of the financial administration of homelessness services in Western Australia (WA). This response brings together the experience of our highly qualified and accomplished housing, homelessness, and family and domestic violence staff and managers, and is informed by the voice of the people who use our services.

As one of Western Australia's largest community service providers, The Salvation Army works, on a daily basis, with some of our state's most disadvantaged and marginalised people. Fundamental to the ethos of The Salvation Army is the idea that every human being has inherent worth, and every person should be able to live with dignity. The Salvation Army envisions an Australia where all people have adequate and stable incomes, can afford and sustain housing, and are healthy and connected to community.

The development of the 'All Paths Lead to a Home' Strategy has led to some of the best collaboration that our services have experienced within the sector but there are still significant barriers to achieving housing outcomes in WA. Some key barriers we draw to the government's attention are:

- There is a shortfall of funding to meet the demand for services;
- The short-term nature of contracts inhibits efficient planning, innovative services design and strategic action;
- Insufficient supply of transitional and long-term housing solutions leads to bottlenecks in emergency and short-term homelessness and family violence services; and
- There are difficulties attracting and retaining staff in the sector, especially in rural and remote areas.

Action to address these barriers is critical to meeting the needs of people at risk of or experiencing homelessness in WA.



Services offered by The Salvation Army in Western Australia

Family and domestic violence services provide support to women and children impacted by family and domestic violence. In WA, the Salvation Army runs two refuges, one in Perth and the second in Karratha.

Salvation Army Housing Western Australia (Salvos Housing) is a community housing organisation that provides homes for individuals and families who are homeless or at-risk of homelessness, are on low incomes, and those with specific support needs.

The Salvation Army offers the following **Homelessness Services** in Western Australia:

- **Residential Services:** The Salvation Army operates four Emergency Accommodation and Referrals Support Services (EARSS) in WA:
 - The Beacon: 102-room emergency and transitional accommodation facility in Perth (maximum occupancy of 114 individuals).
 - Bunbury EARSS: Two onsite family units co-located at Bunbury Corps.
 - Geraldton EARSS: Four onsite family units co-located at the Geraldton Corps Site.
 - Kalgoorlie EARSS: A six-bed emergency accommodation service, providing emergency accommodation to adult males over the age of 25.
- **Community Outreach Programs:** All community outreach programs are run out of metropolitan Perth:
 - **Family Accommodation Program:** A transitional, supported accommodation program, providing accommodation to families who are experiencing or are at-risk of experiencing homelessness. Case management supports families to identify and address the contributing factors of homelessness and assist families to live independently. Program capacity of 10 families at one time.
 - **Street to Home Program:** A comprehensive response, providing intensive case management, accommodation assistance, wrap around and whole person support to individuals who have been or are at-risk of experiencing homelessness. Program capacity of up to 80 clients, with a 12-month support period.
 - **Independent Community Living Program:** This psycho-social program is delivered by support workers who ensure individuals with either lived or diagnosed mental health conditions are supported to: secure and sustain long-term accommodation, address mental health concerns and establish linkages with services to provide and enhance the client's transition to independent living in the community.
- **Assertive Outreach Street Team:** This team delivers a mobile response to members of the community who might find themselves in need during the time of service delivery, and to individuals sleeping rough within the Perth CBD and surrounds.



The Current Funding and Delivery of Services

Shortfall of Funding

Homelessness Services

There is a significant funding shortfall for homelessness services in WA. Inadequate funding across both regional and metropolitan areas, leads to The Salvation Army's services being unable to meet our clients' increasing complexity of need.

Financial barriers also impact on the brokerage support available to service users. Brokerage funds are used to purchase goods and services associated with crisis responses such as health, education, transport, dental, training or household costs. They are also frequently used to purchase short-term motel stays when no beds are available in crisis facilities. Across most of The Salvation Army's homelessness services in WA there is no government funding for brokerage. Brokerage funding is critical to our ability to support clients in both preventing homelessness and breaking the cycle of homelessness because they allow services to tailor supports to meet the specific needs of different clients.

The Salvation Army makes a significant contribution from our own resources in the provision of housing and homelessness services in WA to make up the shortfall of funding, especially for our smaller services. For example, The Salvation Army's Family Accommodation Program receives \$100,966 from the Department of Communities per year; however, the staff's wages (\$99,529) account for almost the entirety of the grant. The Salvation Army provides additional funding to cover operational costs (such as: vehicles, professional development, rent, mobile phones and utilities) and brokerage funds. As mentioned above, brokerage funding is essential when providing assistance for education, training, and employment support.

A major factor in the inadequacy of funding from government is an underestimation of the complexity of needs experienced by clients to our services. For example, at The Beacon, 47 per cent of clients assisted in the last six months had a formal mental health diagnosis. The Salvation Army utilises internal funds for a psychologist to be on site to provide a basic level of support, however given the high proportion of clients with mental health diagnoses there is a need for greater support. Given the importance of mental health to achieving good housing (and life) outcomes it would be hugely beneficial to have a mental health nurse and psychiatrist on site to address the mental health concerns of the client base, however such funding is simply not available.



Family and Domestic Violence Services

The Salvation Army operates two family and domestic violence refuges in WA, one in Karratha and the second in Perth. Both of these services are heavily reliant on philanthropic donors and other internally generated funds.

The Salvation Army has a contract with the Department of Communities to partially fund the operational costs of the refuges. In Perth, that funding covers approximately 50 per cent of the operational cost of the crisis accommodation, however the contract does not cover outreach, counselling services, transitional units, and long-term support. The Salvation Army covers the costs for these additional services internally and if this was not done, we would not be able to provide these critical services. In Karratha, the refuge is also partially supported by government funding and The Salvation Army is reliant on internally generated funds to cover the gap.

As a part of the COVID-19 response in December 2020, The Salvation Army also received additional funding from the Department of Communities to cover a mobile outreach position for two years in both the refuges. Because that funding was specifically provided for a full-time equivalent, it did not allow for other expenses associated with the role such as vehicles and accommodation.

As discussed above, The Salvation Army is currently using philanthropic donations to meet basic needs of the community. We are extremely grateful to donors and the amazing contribution they make to ensure that our services can continue operating, but the nature of donations is that they often do not provide long-term security to a service beyond a year of funding. This, in conjunction with the lack of adequate government funding creates a significant level of uncertainty within our services.

Short Contract Rollovers

Currently, homelessness services in WA that receive government funding predominantly operate on 12-month contract extensions. These rolling, short-term contracts have significant ramifications for the operation of our services, particularly around strategic planning, service delivery and staff retention. The annual contracts are generally renewed with the same funding of the previous year, meaning that there cannot be a strategic conversation between the sector about meeting emerging and changing needs to ensure that the funding covers the changing landscape of homelessness. For example, there has been a significant increase in the complexity of cases in terms of co-morbidity and tri-morbidity of issues, and this results in the need for changes to the worker/client ratios and increased periods of support.

On an operational level, there remain significant issues with contract renewals taking place almost immediately before the existing contract expires instead of in advance. This creates enormous governance and logistical risk for our services and impacts on our ability to retain staff, renew leases and plan strategically. We appreciate that this is never the government's intention, but the practical impact remains. We strongly recommend the Western Australian Government move to longer-term contracts for homelessness services wherever possible.





Bottlenecks in transitional and crisis accommodation

It is our experience that current social housing waitlists in metropolitan, regional and rural areas are at an all-time high. In addition to this, the private rental market is highly competitive and has increased in costs exponentially due to the housing shortage and the impact of COVID-19. This housing shortage has detrimental effects for at-risk members of our communities. The social housing deficit has led to a chronic shortage of available transitional housing options and crisis beds across the state.

As a result of the low vacancy rate in the social housing system, the number of clients able to transition from these temporary accommodation options into long-term accommodation has stagnated. This housing bottleneck has been highlighted by our service streams as one of the most urgent issues that the Western Australian Government needs to address. Our services throughout the state have reported that clients are having to remain in the service for much longer than intended:

- In Karratha, our staff are reporting a **five-year wait for housing**. The Salvation Army's family and domestic violence service in Karratha is a short-term crisis service, but because of the housing crisis **women who should only be staying for 6-8 weeks are now staying for 6-12 months** and are sometimes living in hotel-sized rooms with 2-4 children.
- The Geraldton EARSS which provides crisis accommodation, now has **clients remaining there for 12-18 months** when the service is only supposed to house them for three months.
- In the Family Accommodation Program families are meant to remain in the program for up to two years, however the current lack of exit pathways means that families are now **staying for three to four years**.

Most concerningly the absence of affordable housing exits means that many victim-survivors of family violence feel they have no option but to return to the residence of the perpetrator.

The extended length of stays not only effects the clients who are unable to move into stable long-term accommodation, it also means that new vulnerable clients cannot enter crisis services, placing increased pressure on service providers. Both The Salvation Army's homelessness and family and domestic violence streams in WA have reported significantly high numbers of turn-aways due to our services being at capacity:

- Our family and domestic violence service in Karratha has reported having to **turn away individuals on 600 occasions in the last 12 months**.
- The Family Accommodation Program is currently **turning away five to 10 families a week** and has closed the waitlist as they do not want to give families a false hope.
- In 2021, the Geraldton EARSS had to **turn away individuals on 94 occasions** because the agency had no accommodation available.
- The Beacon, our largest homelessness service in WA, reported that from July 2020 to February 2022, it was able to accommodate 748 clients, but had to **turn away individuals on 309 occasions** due to accommodation being at capacity.

Staffing

Staffing in Regional and Rural Areas

Our services have experienced major struggles in attracting suitable, qualified staff in WA, particularly in remote areas. For example, at the family and domestic violence refuge in Karratha, it took 10 months to recruit a new mobile outreach worker, while our homelessness service in Geraldton had a position vacant for eight months. Remuneration is a major barrier in rural areas, as our services cannot compete with the attractive wages of the mining industry. This difficulty is compounded by a lack of affordable accommodation available for staff.

It is also our experience that the complexity of homelessness clients increases with remoteness and that it is difficult to attract staff that have appropriate skills to work with the complexity of cases in these areas. We encourage the Western Australian Government to consider funding incentives to attract suitable and qualified staff in rural areas, for example by increasing funding so that not only are the wages covered, but also overheads such as housing and transport.

Wages

Wages are also a major barrier to attracting suitable staff in metropolitan regions. It has been our experience that frontline family and domestic violence staff in WA are funded to be paid at a lower rate than every other state and territory in Australia. For example, in Victoria case managers are funded by the Government at SCHADDS level 6 and in South Australia, New South Wales and Tasmania they are mostly funded at SCHADDS level 5. In WA the majority of case managers are funded at SCHADDS level 4. This is a significant disparity in pay and these lower rates make it difficult to retain staff, particularly when we are requiring them to have a university qualification, at least three years post graduate experience and the capability to work with complex family and domestic violence matters with serious offenders.

Recommendations:

We recommend that the Western Australian Government:

- increases funding for homelessness and housing services in Western Australia.
- provides adequate funding for community housing providers to develop housing in regional and rural communities.
- enters into and fulfil a commitment for longer-term service agreements for providers of homelessness and social housing services.
- addresses bottlenecks in crisis accommodation and transitional housing due to the lack of exit points, including into social housing.
- increases the stock of transitional housing and crisis accommodation – particularly in regions where there are no or limited crisis options.
- invests in incentives in regional and rural areas to attract suitable and qualified staff to these areas.



Mark's* Story

Mark, presented at The Salvation Army homelessness service in early 2021 with goals and dreams that he wanted to achieve. "I am finished with my old life in and out of prison... drugs" said Mark when he first came to the service.

The Salvation Army was able to engage Mark with a GP and alcohol and other drug counsellors to successfully get through and off the Methadone Program.

At first Mark struggled and had a lapse but with the help of his case worker's support he was able to pick himself up. After being assisted to obtain an Immigration Card, Mark was able to access training through ReSet, an organisation providing support to people transitioning back into the community, including training and employment opportunities. Mark was assessed and approved for Priority Listing with the Department of Communities – Housing and he also pro-actively searched for private and shared rentals. Mark was an eager participant in the programs offered at the homelessness service (especially the restorative lifestyle program), having received a successful attendance (80 per cent or higher attendance).

Mark was able to find employment before moving into shared accommodation 10 months after his admission to the Homelessness Service.

Mark's story is an example of the importance of the additional wrap around supports that our services are able to offer because of internal funds but are not include in the government funding model.

**Name has been changed*



‘All Paths Lead to a Home’, Western Australia’s 10-Year Strategy on Homelessness 2020-2030

It has been The Salvation Army’s experience that what has come out of the ‘All Paths Lead to a Home’ Strategy is some of the best collaboration that our services have experienced across the sector. The siloed approach that can result from competitive tender processes was sidelined for a collaborative approach where the sector came together to ensure that all clients are able to get the best outcomes. What has resulted from this collaborative approach is that we are seeing chronic rough sleepers come off the street and have successful outcomes because they are receiving the intensive wrap around, place-based, holistic support that they deserve.

Priorities of the Homelessness Strategy

Housing First

The Salvation Army commends the Western Australian Government for prioritising a Housing First approach. A Housing First model has real impact and has resulted in significantly better outcomes for clients. We believe that Housing First approaches should underpin the homelessness response and social housing allocation policy across all of Australia, understanding that this requires a supply of social housing sufficient to meet demand.

A Housing First model has two critical funding requirements: firstly, funding for housing supply and secondly funding for support, that is caseworkers, support workers and specialists. Despite the welcome prioritisation of Housing First, our services have reported that they have not yet seen an increase in social and affordable housing in the state. We acknowledge the significant increase in funding for housing support services and that the Government has been advertising for shovel ready grants, however the labor shortage has made this difficult for services to capitalise on. Public housing supply in WA has reduced, this was partially due to the demolition of large public housing towers that were not safe. The Salvation Army fully supports this decision; however, this cannot lead to a reduction in supply, particularly with an increasing wait-list. Shelter WA highlighted in October 2021 that public housing stock in WA dropped nearly four percent.¹ It is estimated that, in 2020, after a decade of affordable housing policy in WA, less than 7 per cent of the headline affordable housing target of 35,000 dwellings set at the beginning of the decade will have been produced.² Additionally, between 2010 and 2017, 2,020 public housing dwellings were either sold or demolished by the state Government.³

It will take many years and rolling budget commitments before there is adequate flow within the social housing system and capacity to deliver Housing First programs at scale. Therefore, in the shorter term, we consider than an increase in the stock of transitional housing and emergency

¹ Manfield, E & Richards, A. (Oct 2021). As WA’s public housing waitlist ballooned, department spent a fraction of funds report finds. *ABC News*. <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2021-10-21/fraction-of-social-housing-budget-spent-by-wa-department/100555448>

² Community Housing Industry Association, *West Australian Affordable Housing Policy Where to from here?* (2019)

³ Community Housing Industry Association, *West Australian Affordable Housing Policy Where to from here?* (2019)





accommodation centers is also necessary – particularly in regions where there are no or limited crisis options. This will contribute towards the purpose of supporting more people until they can exit into long-term and stable housing.

No Wrong Door

It is critical that any policy response is informed by a thorough and sensitive consideration of how people with multiple or complex needs would interact with the system. This involves recognising that people are complex beings and possess multiple and often interconnected characteristics. This also means that people can (and often do) belong to more than one client cohort group. It is important that the Western Australian Government designs policies and systems that encourage and facilitate better linkages and cooperation between different social service providers.

Our services report that they adopt an approach similar to ‘no wrong door’ in order to achieve the best outcomes for clients. For example, at our Beacon Homelessness Service, walk-ins have reduced from 73 per cent to 51 per cent. This was achieved by forging closer relationships with other referring agencies. At The Beacon, our staff collaborated extensively with the judicial system and also mental health services to streamline the ways in which people are referred to our services and to ensure that the percentage of walk-in clients continues to decrease. ‘No wrong door’ is also a key component of The Salvation Army’s services – no matter which service is accessed (Doorways, Salvos Stores, Moneycare, Homelessness), service users are provided with holistic and wrap around support, including service linkages and inter-agency referrals.

Despite the Western Australian Government prioritising ‘no wrong door’, the other issues discussed in this submission mean that there is still not an approach that ensures that people can get help regardless of which service or agency they connect with. The improvements that our services are currently undertaking, including the collaboration with other services, have all been internally driven with no additional support from government.

Rough Sleeping

The Salvation army commends the Western Australian Government on the funding of the Zero Project and the By Name List that is run by RUAH Community Services. Our services have reported a noticeable difference since the commencement of the By Name List in that it allows service providers to provide greater support to those that are rough sleeping. It has resulted in significantly increased collaboration and resource sharing between agencies, allowing for greater and enhanced client outcomes through collective impact. This is often a goodwill gesture of inter-agency collaboration, as most agencies in the collective remain under-funded and under-resourced.

The Government can provide even greater support to rough sleepers by adequately funding assertive outreach teams. It is our experience that the current provision of funding is often a reactionary response to a crisis. The Western Australian Government would be better placed to provide consistent funding that will carry through, as this will allow services to plan properly and employ properly trained trauma-informed staff.





The Homelessness Strategy refers to rough sleepers as the 'most vulnerable'. When responding to rough sleepers, the Western Australian Government also needs to consider targeting women in violent relationships. For these women, rough sleeping is often the safest option as they are away from the perpetrator. The most vulnerable within this group are instead those that are still living with the perpetrator. It is therefore important that the Western Australian Government acknowledges the distinction between a family and domestic violence scenario compared to another person who is rough sleeping.

The below case study is an example of the complex nature of those experiencing homelessness, particularly rough sleeping, and the importance of collaboration in achieving positive client outcomes and achieving collective impact.

James and Sarah's* Story

The Assertive Outreach Team (AOT) received a notification from the Department of Communities that a couple were rough sleeping in a location close to a freeway off-ramp, which was a particularly at-risk location. When attending the site, the AOT identified that Sarah and James had recently vacated a backpackers that had closed, where they were staying free of charge, in exchange for cleaning duties.

Sarah was unable to obtain any income supports as she was a [REDACTED] citizen and has not yet lived in Australia for 10 years, while James had recently lost his employment due to rough sleeping.

The AOT identified that there was a risk of family and domestic violence, due to a recent assault on Sarah. The AOT worked in collaboration with The Beacon EARSS service, and the two services identified that the risk of family and domestic violence increased the need to house the couple so that Sarah would be visible to a service. One day after the initial contact Sarah and James were provided with transport by the AOT to The Beacon and provided with a couple's room.

Less than a week after intake, Sarah was assaulted by James, and he had services withdrawn. Sarah continues to be provided with counselling and intensive case management and support and continues to reside at The Beacon fee free due to not having an income (donor funding is being utilised). James is no longer housed at The Beacon, however he is continuing to engage with the AOT, who are providing referrals and support in an attempt to secure alternative accommodation support.

**Names have been changed*



Place-based response

The Salvation Army welcomes the announcement of Common Ground projects in Perth and Mandurah as these services will be important in ensuring that clients receive support that is informed by local needs and context.

The decision from the accreditation of homelessness service providers and goodwill groups to have all services operate within the City of Perth from a designated site has however made it difficult for our assertive outreach to continue providing place-based support. Our concern with deploying all services from a single location is that it requires rough sleepers to move away from the places where they feel safe and secure to access a service, where previously the outreach services would go to them.

The Salvation Army has the benefit of operating services in metropolitan, regional, and rural areas of WA. This allows us to see the disparity in services available in these areas. The collaboration that homelessness services have been able to achieve in Perth has unfortunately not been replicated in regional and rural areas. This is because the lack of funding is more acute in these areas meaning that they do not have the same resources as services in Perth to facilitate effective collaboration. For example, in Karratha the only service available for women is The Salvation Army's crisis accommodation, comprising only four apartments. It is our experience that there are currently few services available in rural and regional areas in WA.

Recommendations:

- The Western Australia Government increase social housing stock and consider investor incentives to increase affordable rental stock.
- The Western Australian Government adequately funds assertive outreach teams to ensure they can provide support to rough sleepers.
- The Western Australian Government designs policies and systems that encourage and facilitate better linkages and cooperation between different social service providers.
- The Western Australian Government significantly increases the funding of homelessness services in regional and rural areas to ensure that clients in these areas are able to experience the same wrap around supports available for those in metropolitan Perth.



Stephanie's* Story

Stephanie has been in an abusive relationship for over four years and was referred to The Salvation Army's family and domestic violence service by the Police. Stephanie presented to the refuge with her grand-daughter whom she had care of. When Stephanie arrived at the service, she had a black eye and cuts to her face after an incident with the perpetrator. The perpetrator had been charged with common assault and was awaiting court. Stephanie had been left homeless as she cannot afford a private rental or short-term accommodation such as a motel.

The Salvation Army's crisis refuge was able to provide Stephanie with the following services: case management, referral to external counselling service, engagement with Aboriginal Health Services, vouchers for clothes and food, and engagement with refuge programs particularly a yarnning group and cooking sessions.

Stephanie has complied with all requirements required by refuge residents and has been put on the urgent waitlist with the Department of Communities – Housing. Stephanie continues to attend regular counselling sessions and is feeling empowered.

**Name has been changed*



Existing Data Systems and How Data Informs Service Delivery

Reporting Requirements

There is considerable merit in reporting and reviewing services as the data that results from these reports not only reveals the success of a program but also has the potential to greatly impact policy and research.

There are substantial reporting requirements for every grant that the Western Australian Government awards to The Salvation Army. We are enthusiastic participants of these processes and welcome the opportunity to report and review our programs, particularly those that are funded by government. For example, the Western Australian Government currently funds a mobile outreach worker in Karratha through The Salvation Army. This worker is required to update their statistics monthly and then a quarterly report is to be completed for the overall operation of funding. The funding model needs to take into account the expense associated with gathering this information for reports.

We also believe that these reports are limited by the fact that feedback is not provided back to the services on how the reports are being used by Government. The Department of Communities should therefore consider compiling the information from the reports and sharing it with services and stakeholders. In doing so, services would be able to see the benefits of the reporting requirements and be privy to the operations of other services, trends across the service system and how the reports are being used to inform decision-making.

Recommendation

- The Western Australian Government provides transparent data from the quarterly reports that services complete to allow service providers to see the operations of other services, trends across the service system and how the reports are being used to inform decision making.



About The Salvation Army

The Salvation Army is an international Christian movement with a presence in more than 130 countries. Operating in Australia since 1880, The Salvation Army is one of the largest providers of social services and programs for people experiencing hardship, injustice and social exclusion.

The Salvation Army Australia provides more than 1,000 social programs and activities through networks of social support services, community centres and churches across the country.

Programs include:

- Financial counselling, financial literacy and microfinance
- Emergency relief and related services
- Homelessness services
- Youth services
- Family and domestic violence services
- Alcohol, drugs and other addictions
- Chaplaincy
- Emergency and disaster response
- Aged care
- Employment services

As a mission-driven organisation, The Salvation Army seeks to reduce social disadvantage and create a fair and harmonious society through holistic and person-centred approaches that reflect our mission to share the love of Jesus by:

- Caring for people
- Creating faith pathways
- Building healthy communities
- Working for justice

We commit ourselves in prayer and practice to this land of Australia and its people, seeking reconciliation, unity and equity.

Further Information

The Salvation Army would welcome the opportunity to discuss the content of this submission should any further information be of assistance. Further information can be sought from Major Paul Hateley, National Head of Government Relations, at government.relations@salvationarmy.org.au or on

