

Responding to
Homelessness



Contents

Foreword	1
Some facts about homelessness	2
What is homelessness?	2
What causes homelessness?	2
Queensland Government responses to homelessness	3
Snapshot of new activity	3
New Government responses to homelessness	4
Providing more accommodation and support options	4
Connecting people with services	5
Responding to homelessness and public space issues	5
Meeting the needs of homeless people in the legal system	6
Helping residential services stay open	6
Meeting the health needs of homeless people	7
What we're doing now	8

Foreword

Homelessness affects many Queenslanders, from single young people to families with children. People who are homeless can become disconnected from society which impacts on the whole community.

The Queensland Government is concerned about homelessness and recognises that such a complex issue cannot always be resolved quickly or by any one agency. Providing safe, affordable housing goes some way towards addressing homelessness, but it will not be resolved simply by providing housing. We can reduce the occurrence and duration of homelessness by intervening early to help people find pathways to more stable living.

This document outlines what we are doing now and what we will do in the future to reduce the number of people who are homeless in Queensland and to deal with public space issues.

The State Government is directing funds of \$235.52 million over four years to address homelessness. State government agencies are working together to improve existing responses and better integrate services for people at risk of homelessness, people experiencing crisis homelessness, and people for whom homelessness has become a way of life.

This funding will provide additional initiatives that will complement the full range of housing assistance provided through the Department of Housing to people who are in need, on low incomes, and who would otherwise be in housing stress.

PETER BEATTIE MP
PREMIER OF QUEENSLAND
AND MINISTER FOR TRADE

ROBERT SCHWARTEN MP
MINISTER FOR PUBLIC WORKS,
HOUSING AND RACING

Some facts about homelessness



Queensland Government responses to homelessness will be targeted to people who have no shelter.

What is homelessness?

Homelessness has many forms.

These include:

- ›› having no shelter and living in public spaces, in abandoned buildings or out of a car;
- ›› having no permanent shelter and sleeping regularly on the floor or couch, in the garage or under the house of relatives and friends or in crisis shelters;
- ›› living in overcrowded conditions;
- ›› living in shared living arrangements where there is no security or safety; and
- ›› living in a violent household, or in a domestic violence shelter to escape this violence.

What causes homelessness?

The causes of homelessness are complex and interlinked. It is usually caused by a combination of factors such as lack of access to low-cost housing, high rates of unemployment, job loss, relationship breakdown, or experiencing trauma or abuse or substance misuse.

Homelessness affects people of all ages, and from all social and economic groups in the community. However, some groups are over-represented, or are at particular risk.

These groups include:

- ›› Indigenous people;
- ›› young people, including those who have been in the care of the State;
- ›› women and children experiencing or witnessing domestic, family and/or community violence;
- ›› people with a mental health issue, a disability or a history of abuse and/or trauma;
- ›› people with substance abuse issues;
- ›› people without access to employment or income; and
- ›› people newly released from prison.

People in the community use public spaces for many reasons, including social and cultural reasons. Groups of people gathering in public spaces are often assumed to be homeless even when this is not the case. This can lead to misunderstandings about the nature of homelessness and about who is homeless.

The community may perceive a link between homelessness and public intoxication, which may occur in the same locations. However, not all homeless people in public spaces use intoxicants, and many people who use them are not homeless. People who are intoxicated in public places present an increased risk of harm—to themselves and others—and need support to ensure their safety and to move towards sobriety and well-being.

Queensland Government responses to homelessness

Snapshot of new activity

The Queensland Government will direct an additional **\$235.52 million** in the next four years to boost responses to homelessness. This significant commitment in capital and recurrent funding will build on existing initiatives to help homeless people and establish new and innovative ones.

The Queensland Government will, over time, reduce the number of homeless people who have no shelter. The Government's goal is to ensure homeless people have access to an integrated service system that meets their immediate needs and that leads to opportunities for connecting with and participating as part of the community.

The **\$235.52 million** will:

- » provide more accommodation options for homeless people in our communities;
- » connect people with services;
- » respond to public space issues including the misuse of drugs and/or alcohol;
- » meet the mental health needs of homeless people;
- » meet the needs of homeless people in the legal system; and
- » help residential services stay open.

New initiatives will be funded through the following departments:

- » Department of Communities;
- » Department of Housing;
- » Department of Justice and Attorney-General;
- » Department of Tourism, Fair Trading and Wine Industry Development;
- » Department of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Policy;
- » Queensland Health; and
- » Queensland Police Service.



Some funding will be used to provide more low-cost housing, such as this community housing property.

These women's shelters in northern Queensland were funded through the Crisis Accommodation Program.



New Government responses to homelessness

Providing more accommodation and support options

More accommodation will be provided for homeless people, including:

- » **\$30 million** over five years, which will be spent redeveloping the Lady Bowen complex in Spring Hill, Brisbane, to provide accommodation and support services for homeless people in the inner city. Stage One of the redevelopment will convert one of the buildings to provide supported accommodation 24 hours a day, seven days a week, for homeless people with complex needs who may be excluded from other services. Later stages will provide longer-term accommodation and office space for community organisations to support homeless people (Department of Housing/Department of Communities);
- » **\$45.44 million** over four years, which will be provided for additional crisis and transitional accommodation for homeless people in Cairns, Townsville, Gold Coast, Mt Isa and Brisbane. This includes funding for support for clients (Department of Housing/Department of Communities);
- » around **\$500,000** per annum, which will be allocated to provide responses to homelessness on the Sunshine Coast (Department of Communities); and
- » a **\$50 million** package of assistance, including \$5.8 million from the Smart State Building Fund, which will provide boarding style accommodation for single people, including homeless single people (Department of Housing).

Connecting people with services

Intervening early can prevent people becoming homeless in the first place, or moving into long-term homelessness. New Queensland Government initiatives to assist people include:

- » **\$4.02 million** over four years to establish and operate a statewide call centre for homeless people as an entry point to the homelessness service system. The call centre will assess housing and support needs and will direct clients to the service that best meets their needs (Department of Communities);
- » **\$12.60 million** over four years to assist homeless people in Cairns, Townsville, Gold Coast, and inner Brisbane access accommodation and information by establishing information, referral, assessment and brokerage 'service hubs'. The service hubs will also provide outreach services for homeless people living on the street or in parks (Department of Communities/Department of Housing); and
- » **\$10.41 million** over four years to assist people in private rental or public housing who are at risk of becoming homeless and who require short-term assistance through Early Intervention and Outreach Services. The target group for these services includes vulnerable people living in hostels and boarding houses. Services will be provided in 11 locations across Queensland (Department of Communities).

Responding to homelessness and public space issues

Over the next four years, the Government will provide:

- » **\$4.92 million** to improve community safety and amenity by providing public intoxication outreach services for Cairns and North Brisbane, and extending existing outreach services in the Gold Coast, Townsville, Mt Isa and Brisbane (Department of Communities and Department of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Policy);
- » **\$4.55 million** to develop additional services and activities to promote the safety of young people who engage, or are at risk of engaging, in the misuse of volatile substances such as paint, petrol or glue (Department of Communities); and
- » **\$1.86 million** over four years to appoint six Police Liaison Officers to work in Community Patrols in Cairns, Townsville and Mt Isa. The Officers will work with police and Indigenous people to reduce the rate at which homeless Indigenous people are arrested. This initiative will enhance community safety by:
 - › monitoring identified public spaces with a history of anti-social behaviour;
 - › linking homeless people to relevant government and non-government support networks and agencies;
 - › defusing conflict and preventing violence by mediation; and
 - › arranging transport to safer places for people affected by alcohol (Queensland Police Service).



Police Liaison Officers build positive relationships with their community.

A call centre will provide information and referral services for homeless people.



Residential services like this one provide accommodation for people on low incomes.



Meeting the needs of homeless people in the legal system

The Queensland Government will spend **\$978,000** on three new initiatives to help homeless people when they come into contact with the criminal justice system for minor offences.

Because homeless people live a large part of their lives in public spaces, they are particularly vulnerable to contact with the criminal justice system for minor offences such as public nuisance and public drunkenness.

New initiatives to divert homeless people from custody, and address the causes of the offences, include providing:

» **\$306,000** for a two-year pilot program in the Brisbane Magistrates Court to support and divert homeless people charged with minor public order offences. A Court Liaison Officer will provide referrals to services that provide accommodation, health care and support to address the personal circumstances that lead to the commission of offences. The Liaison Officer will also provide information to the Court about the particular circumstances of homeless defendants and alternative sentencing options for homeless people (Department of Justice and Attorney-General);

» **\$190,000** to support a 12-month trial in Cairns of a treatment-based response to alcohol-related offences as an alternative to imprisonment. This will support people who are referred to a residential treatment program by the Court through alcohol counselling (Department of Communities); and

» **\$482,000** to implement a State Penalties Enforcement Registry communication and training program. The program will increase awareness of fine payment options amongst homeless people and services that work with homeless people, reducing the risk of non-payment of fines, and therefore imprisonment, for minor offences (Department of Justice and Attorney-General).

Helping residential services stay open

The Queensland Government is providing extra help to residential services operators to implement the *Residential Services (Accreditation) Act 2002*, which is designed to improve physical amenity and safety in residential services.

Helping residential services to comply with the Act, and therefore to stay open, will help reduce the risk of people living in residential services losing their shelter through closure of accommodation.

The Queensland Government will spend **\$2.32 million** over four years to:

- » provide assistance and guidance to service providers who are registering their residential services;
- » help service providers to work through the accreditation process; and
- » undertake ongoing evaluation and refinement of the accreditation process, and of the Act itself, to make sure it works for service providers (Department of Tourism, Fair Trading and Wine Industry Development).



Funding will provide health support services to assist homeless people.

Meeting the health needs of homeless people

Funding of **\$43.59 million** over four years will be provided to address the complex health needs of people with a mental illness and/or alcohol and other drug problems who are homeless in areas of high need in Queensland. The services will be accessible by, and responsive to, this vulnerable group. The services will provide a coordinated system of care through collaborating with, and building the skills and capacity of, other sectors to work with this client group. Recurrent funding for 2008–09 is \$13.81 million.

This funding will:

- » establish treatment, support and rehabilitation services for people with mental illness who cannot be discharged from hospital because they lack adequate support or suitable accommodation. If discharged without this support, these people are at risk of homelessness (Queensland Health);

- » provide specialist mental health, general health, and drug and alcohol services to assist homeless people who are sleeping in public spaces, squats and other improvised dwellings (Queensland Health); and
- » establish an appropriate alcohol and drug withdrawal service in Townsville for Indigenous people who are homeless to address substance misuse issues that may contribute to their homelessness (Queensland Health).

An additional **\$5.55 million** over four years will be provided to fund more housing for clients of mental health services living in unsuitable accommodation (Department of Housing).

These new initiatives will build on the Government's many existing initiatives that help homeless people.

What we're doing now

A number of existing responses already assist homeless people.



Young people at risk of becoming homeless need to be able to continue their schooling.

During 2004–2005:

» **\$48.1 million** was provided through the Supported Accommodation Assistance Program to provide support services to people who are homeless or at imminent risk of homelessness. This program is jointly funded by the Queensland and Australian Governments and administered in Queensland by the Department of Communities. These funds were distributed to 195 non-Government agencies to provide services to homeless young people, single men, single women, families, and women and children escaping domestic violence;

» **\$22.4 million** was provided through the Crisis Accommodation Program to fund the construction and purchase of dwellings for use as crisis and transitional housing. These funds are also provided to community organisations to lease accommodation properties in the private rental market. This program is jointly funded by the Queensland and Australian Governments and administered in Queensland by the Department of Housing;

» **\$1.4 million** was provided to fund services responding to the safety and support needs of people who are intoxicated in public places and at risk of harm. These services include outreach and support services in key locations across Queensland through the Management of Public Intoxication Program (Department of Communities).

The Queensland Government is also:

» providing information about post-release accommodation options to offenders in all Queensland correctional centres through the Pre-Release Transitions Program. All offenders approaching release have the opportunity to participate in this program (Department of Corrective Services);

» improving early intervention and targeted health responses, within existing resources, to homeless people with a dual diagnosis (a mental illness and a substance misuse issue) by identifying more responsive service models (Queensland Health);

- » ensuring that young people at risk are supported to continue education or training (Education Queensland and Department of Employment and Training);
- » creating pathways out of homelessness by providing opportunities for homeless people, and people at risk of homelessness, to participate in employment and training in rural and remote communities (Department of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Policy);
- » improving access to Home and Community Care Services for eligible homeless people, through 10 Home and Community Care homelessness projects located at the Gold Coast, Toowoomba, Ipswich, South Brisbane, North Brisbane, Townsville and Cairns (Queensland Health);
- » preventing additional homelessness by coordinating all relevant Government services to ensure that people displaced by the closure of residential services are assisted into new accommodation (led by Department of Housing);
- » providing early intervention services to newly homeless Indigenous people in Cairns, Townsville and Mt Isa through case management and 'point of first contact' approaches to lessen the impacts of long-term homelessness (Department of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Policy);
- » providing training and information sessions to homeless Indigenous people in Cairns, Townsville and Mt Isa to enhance their capacity to live independently (Department of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Policy);
- » supporting local area groups such as the Joint Management Groups in Townsville and Cairns and the Government Coordinating Group in Mt Isa to identify local solutions for local homelessness issues (whole-of-Government); and
- » improving, with the assistance of an Australian Government grant, the safety of young people who misuse volatile substances (such as paint, glue and petrol) through the trial of 'Places of Safety' in which young people can recover from the effects of volatile substance misuse in a supervised environment (Department of Communities).

>> To find out more about homelessness

Email homelessness@housing.qld.gov.au



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