Message from the Minister

The NSW Government has made a strong commitment through *NSW 2021, A plan to make NSW number one*, to reduce homelessness and the likelihood of repeated episodes of homelessness.

Homelessness is a complex problem and addressing it requires a whole of community and government effort. Specialist homelessness services are an important part of this effort and work at the frontline both with people at risk of homelessness and those who are already without somewhere safe or stable to live. The Government recognises the dedication and commitment of the wide range of organisations, large and small, working to help homeless people.

Despite this effort, too many people are still only accessing support after things have reached crisis point and when initial problems have developed into large and costly ones. Too many people still experience repeat episodes of homelessness, and re-presenting with the same problems.

We want to build on what currently works well and provide better services and lives for homeless people. Our aim is to act earlier to stop people from becoming homeless and to adopt individualised approaches to give homeless people the best possible chance of finding and staying in safe and affordable housing.

We want services to be located where they are needed and for clients to have more say in the way services are designed and, where possible, to have more control over the way services are provided.

Reducing and preventing homelessness is a major challenge. Successful reform has to be done in partnership with the full range of stakeholders and ensure a strong voice for people facing homelessness and the service providers that try to meet their needs.

I look forward to government, the sector and the community working together to respond more effectively to this challenge and to making a real difference for people facing homelessness.

Pru Goward MP
Minister for Family and Community Services

*Minister for Women*
Foreword

The Department of Family and Community Services (FACS), through Housing NSW and Community Services, will lead Going Home Staying Home, a program of reform to strengthen and improve the specialist homelessness service system.

Much of the current service system in which the specialist homelessness services operate was created in the mid-1980s. Working in collaboration with this sector, the Department wants to shape the future of the system for the next 20 years to better support people who are homeless or are at risk of homelessness.

The Department will work with service providers, peak groups and experts as well as with homeless people and clients of homelessness services to design and deliver on this important reform.

The reform aims to improve access to the right type of housing and support for homeless people and ensure that the service approaches that are funded deliver sustainable housing and support outcomes. The reform will also improve the structure, quality and contracting of services and develop the workforce to keep pace with a more effective and efficient service system.

In a climate of increasing demand, we need to ensure that funding for services is needs based, and that service approaches represent what is known to work well in preventing and reducing homelessness.

While the focus of Going Home Staying Home is on the specialist homelessness service system, the Department will continue to work to improve the broader homelessness service system. This work will include addressing access to specialist support services and housing assistance for people facing homelessness and improving pathways into homelessness services from mainstream services.

These reforms will be developed and put in place over the next two years. They will take full effect from July 2014.

We invite you to participate in this important reform program and look forward to working with you on its implementation.

Mike Allen
Chief Executive
Housing NSW

Maree Walk
Chief Executive
Community Services
1. Introduction

People facing homelessness are among the most vulnerable, marginalised and disadvantaged in our community. Individuals and families face homelessness for a diverse range of reasons including poverty, family breakdown, domestic and family violence, mental health issues, drug and alcohol issues, inability to integrate into the community after exiting care or when leaving institutional environments such as prisons.

Specialist Homelessness Services (SHS) are non-government services with expertise in supporting homeless people. They work at the frontline of homelessness by offering crisis accommodation and other support services. They are funded jointly by the Commonwealth and State Governments and through self-funding, voluntary contributions of the sector and sometimes philanthropic contributions. Many SHS deliver a broader range of complementary services using their own resources and other government funding.

Homelessness services have made a great deal of progress in the last few years to refocus their activities away from crisis towards preventative measures, acting earlier and offering post-crisis support. There has also been a growing effort to improve collaboration and coordination. We now need to build on these efforts to better position the specialist homelessness service system to reduce homelessness and repeat episodes of homelessness.

The changes to the service system can not occur in isolation, but need to be embedded in broader reforms reflected in the four key themes outlined in FACS Strategic Directions.

- A focus on people not programs — moving away from a program focus towards developing solutions that will support client outcomes. Clients will have more say in the way services are designed, and where possible, they will have control of the way services are provided, for example through individualised funding.
- Work with individuals and families as soon as possible so that small problems don’t develop into large and costly ones — working with people so that they will have the skills to help themselves, rather than becoming dependent on government services.
- Harness community capacity — recognising that the community at its broadest - families, friends, small business, large corporations, investors, philanthropists, NGOs – plays a significant role in the lives of people who may also be SHS clients.
- A focus on results — recognising that the future shape of the service system will require different capabilities and activities across the system.

While there is a strong evidence base and broad stakeholder support for new approaches to tackle homelessness, there is no shared ‘roadmap’ for the reforms needed to make any changes sustainable.

This consultation paper provides the broad framework for the development of the ‘building blocks’ for reform of the specialist homelessness service system. It sets the broad strategic and policy intent for the reforms and seeks feedback from stakeholders about its design and implementation. The paper is the start of a consultation process, with detailed development of the ‘building blocks’ for reform to be done in partnership with the specialist homelessness service sector. Details of the consultation process and how stakeholders can participate are described in Section 4.
1.1 Homelessness in NSW

It is difficult to measure the full extent of homelessness, in large part because of problems in undertaking counts of people who do not have a stable place to live.

The reasons that people become homeless are complex. They include:

- family breakdown
- women and children fleeing domestic and family violence
- people unable to sustain tenancies due to mental health issues, drug and alcohol and gambling problems
- young people leaving care not having adequate support to transition to independent living
- prisoners exiting into the community not having the rental history, skills or income to access or sustain a tenancy
- people not being able to access the right type of housing when they need it
- people not being able to afford to rent or buy a home.

In recent years, the composition of the homeless population has changed – there are now more children, families and older people experiencing homelessness. The Counting the Homeless report (using 2006 census data) identified over 27,000 homeless people state-wide. Of these:

- 59% were male
- 41% were female
- 11% were children under 12 years
- 28% were aged 12 to 24 years
- 17% were over 55 years.

Aboriginal people are one of the most vulnerable groups of homeless people. More than 7% of homeless people are Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islanders, while representing only 2.2% of the general NSW population.

1.2 Homelessness service system

Reflecting the complex and interrelated nature of homelessness, there are a number of parts to the homelessness service system that provide support and assistance through government and non-government providers.

SHS are one part of the homelessness service system that works to address the needs of people facing homelessness along with specialist support services, mainstream services and social housing services.

SHS

SHS refers to crisis accommodation, medium-term accommodation and other services previously funded under the Supported Accommodated Assistance Program (SAAP) and projects funded under the National Partnership Agreement on Homelessness (NPAH). SHS are currently delivered through more than 350 funded services with expenditure of over $130m per annum. In broad terms, SHS services often include projects funded under the NPAH.
Specialist services

Specialist services provide support for people with particular issues such as those with mental health issues, drug and alcohol issues, a disability or escaping domestic and family violence. While not specifically targeted at people facing homelessness, many specialist service clients are homeless or at increased risk of homelessness because of their support needs. Specialist services are provided by a range of NSW Government agencies and NGOs.

Mainstream services

Mainstream services used by the wider community include health services, Centrelink and universal employment services, education, justice, family and community services, and aged care services. Mainstream service providers are often the first to become aware that a client is homeless or at risk of becoming homeless. They have a unique opportunity to stop smaller problems escalating and, if relevant, make referrals to specialist services and/or specialist homelessness services.

Social housing services

Housing assistance primarily refers to long-term subsidised rental housing (public housing, community housing, Aboriginal housing) and other housing assistance products (such as assistance to establish private rental tenancies) for eligible clients who are able to independently manage a tenancy with or without support. Housing assistance products are targeted on the basis of need, with highest priority given to people who are in urgent need of housing and unable to resolve that need themselves. A significant number of SHS are also registered community housing providers who manage the properties used to deliver crisis and medium-term accommodation.

In aggregate, the homelessness service system is a diverse network of different services across the government and NGO sectors that reflect the complexity and diversity of homelessness itself. Rather than discrete, stand-alone system elements, the various parts are interconnected — with interdependencies that require strong service integration to successfully address the needs of people facing homelessness. Similarly, many service providers within the homelessness service system receive resources under multiple programs and funding streams — each with different contractual and regulatory arrangements that need to be coordinated to avoid unnecessary red tape and sub-optimal service planning.

1.3 Working together to respond to homelessness

Over the last few years, significant effort has gone into better integration and coordination between the different parts of the homelessness service system as part of the whole-of-government strategy to address homelessness.

The NSW Government has committed through NSW 2021 and the National Partnership Agreement on Homelessness (NPAH) to achieving specific targets for reducing homelessness in NSW by 2013:

- a 7% reduction in overall homelessness
- a 25% reduction in the number of rough sleepers
- a 33% reduction in Aboriginal homelessness.

To date, the NSW Homelessness Action Plan (HAP) has guided the whole-of-government strategy for how the different parts of the homelessness service system contribute to reducing homelessness. The three strategic directions in the HAP continue to drive efforts to address homelessness in NSW:
1. Preventing homelessness: to ensure that people never become homeless
2. Responding effectively to homelessness: to ensure that people who are homeless receive effective responses so that they do not become entrenched in the system
3. Breaking the cycle: to ensure that people who have been homeless do not become homeless again.

The collective efforts of all parts of the homelessness service system have resulted in a number of improvements over recent years that we can build on. These include:

- implementing innovative preventative measures
- developing multi-disciplinary support models to enable clients to get a holistic response from one service if possible
- implementing ‘Housing First’ models to transition clients into long-term sustainable housing without the requirement to progress through crisis and transitional housing
- implementing integrated housing and support initiatives for women and children escaping domestic and family violence who are homeless or at risk of homelessness
- strengthening outreach and support services to rough sleepers, including mental health and drug and alcohol support
- providing intensive support to young people with complex needs who are homeless or at risk of homelessness, with a focus on young people leaving care
- providing appropriate long-term housing and support models for Aboriginal people who are homeless or at risk of homelessness
- promoting reintegration of people leaving custody through targeted housing and support models
- building the evidence base about effective practice.

In 2010-11, through NPAH and the combined efforts of SHS and other services, major achievements include (NPAH NSW Implementation Plan Year Two Annual Report 2010/11):

- 2,437 clients received housing assistance under NPAH initiatives
- 542 rough sleepers were supported by six services in high-need locations
- 48,709 private and public tenants were provided with legal, financial or other support to access or sustain tenancies
- 1,180 people exiting care and custodial settings, health or disability facilities were supported to access housing assistance
- 757 young people were supported by initiatives that provide intensive support for homeless young people with complex needs.

More information on progress of NSW initiatives, including case studies, is available in the National Partnership Agreement on Homelessness NSW Implementation Plan 2009-2013 Year One Annual Report 2009-2010 available from the Australian Government’s Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs website.

This work has occurred in the context of broader achievements that support reductions in homelessness, in particular:

- a significant increase in the supply of social housing through the National Building Economic Stimulus Plan – Social Housing Initiative
- continued growth in the community housing sector.
Looking forward, it will be important to develop new strategies that build on lessons learned through the HAP and that give effect to the four FACS strategic directions. This will require consideration of:

- individualised approaches
- preventative measures and acting early to stop initial problems become large and costly ones
- better integration and coordination between services, including coordination of how to harness community capacity
- stronger focus on regional needs and priorities.

Within FACS, this translates not only into reforms to improve the specialist homelessness service system, but related initiatives such as developing a social housing strategy, supporting the growth of community housing, and domestic and family violence reforms.

### Consultation questions

1. What are the opportunities to build on existing approaches to providing support to stop people becoming homeless?
2. What are the opportunities to build on existing effective approaches that give homeless people the best possible chance of finding and staying in safe and affordable housing?
3. What are the opportunities to build on existing effective approaches to building and sustaining partnerships with NGOs?
4. What are the opportunities to improve coordination and integration of the homelessness services system across SHS, mainstream and specialist services?

### 1.4 Case for reform

While reform is needed in all parts of the homelessness service system to deliver improved services and quality of life for homeless people, this paper focuses on reform of the SHS system – in particular the structural changes needed to shape the future of the service system.

But why is change needed? What would be the impact on people facing homelessness if we don’t change and continue with business as usual?

The SHS system supports families in crisis, women and children affected by domestic and family violence, young people, and single adults using a case management approach that draws on a range of services including accommodation, general support (advice, advocacy, living skills), basic support (meals, showers, and transport), personal/emotional support for families and relationships, financial and employment support, and linkages with mainstream and specialist services.

Between 2006/07 and 2010/11, there was a 34% increase in SHS clients and a 25% increase in the number of support periods (Figure 1; AIHW, Government-funded SHS 2010-11, NSW, Table A3). In NSW during 2010/11, SHS assisted 65,400 people (44,100 adult clients and 21,300 accompanying children) and provided 95,200 periods of support (AIHW, Government-funded SHS 2010-11, NSW). During the same time there was also a significant increase in the number of people assisted with Temporary Accommodation (TA). There has been an 85% increase in the
number of households accessing TA since 2006/07 – an almost two-fold increase. There has also been a four-fold increase in costs since 2006/07 (Housing NSW data on temporary accommodation assistance). It is acknowledged that there has been a significant decline in TA over the last year due to the tightening of policy settings.

Despite the effort and commitment of many specialist homelessness services to respond to rising demand, a number of limitations of the current system have been consistently identified by homeless people, their advocates and homelessness services.

First, many people who face homelessness move in and out of homelessness, often as repeat users of SHS or ‘churning’ between SHS and other services. In the four — year period between 2006-07 and 2009-10, 15% of SHS clients in NSW presented five or more times (PWC analysis of AIHW SAAP client data, 2011). Clients who had multiple episodes of support were more likely to access accommodation services rather than non-accommodation services (Table 1 - PWC analysis of AIHW SAAP client data, 2011).

<table>
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<th>Service Groups</th>
<th>One</th>
<th>Two</th>
<th>Three</th>
<th>Four</th>
<th>Five +</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
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<td>Accommodation support</td>
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<td>20%</td>
<td>11%</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td>18%</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-accommodation support</td>
<td>76%</td>
<td>16%</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>51%</td>
<td>19%</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>15%</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Many of the drivers of repeat use and churn are outside the control of the SHS system: in particular, a lack of affordable long-term housing, poor discharge practices in mainstream services and a lack of specialist support services to address
Future directions for specialist homelessness services

underlying needs. However, what is potentially within its control is the timing and context of how it intervenes and the extent to which support can follow the client even after they leave crisis accommodation. Currently, the increased demand has meant that SHS are predominantly focused on crisis accommodation rather than a balance that includes preventative measures and post-crisis support. This increase in demand results in clients seeking help being turned away. On the night of the 2006 ABS Census, over 5,000 people were staying in SHS in NSW and these services reported that over half of new and immediate requests for accommodation on a given day were turned away.

Second, the way clients access SHS, especially in a crisis, is often fragmented and complex. For example, many clients repeatedly use both SHS and TA but have to go through different access points for these services. Not having a consistent approach to access, assessment and referral can result in clients not getting the right services at the right time.

At the local level, individual SHS and groups of providers have put in place a range of initiatives to streamline client access and the NPAH has funded a number of projects aimed at improving the coordination of access arrangements. However, there are system barriers that work against these arrangements including:

- multiple entry points that mean people seeking assistance find it hard to navigate and have to tell their story over and over again
- different assessment processes across programs and providers that mean clients with comparable needs may not get access to the right services at the right time
- inadequate mechanisms to share information about assessments of client risk
- inadequate formal mechanisms to systematically share client information (including access to case plans by multiple professionals)
- inadequate formal mechanisms to coordinate referrals, giving rise to the potential for clients who use multiple entry points to receive multiple referrals for the same service.

Third, many people are not getting the post-crisis support they need to maintain stable housing, particularly those with chronic mental health and drug and alcohol issues. This group of homeless people is also the highest cost users because of the complexity of their needs. Recent analysis found that people who have accessed crisis accommodation three or more times for a variety of reasons, including those seeking help with drug and alcohol/health conditions, represent about 6% of all clients but account for 23% of expenditure (PWC analysis of AIHW SAAP client data, 2011).

The way the system is designed makes it difficult for clients to continue to receive support after they leave crisis accommodation. While many SHS have increased their outreach, there remains a gap in flexible delivery of support that is not accommodation-based.

Fourth, sector consultations have repeatedly highlighted that the lack of affordable and secure long-term housing, as well as discrimination in the private rental market, significantly affects the ability of SHS to exit people from homelessness and reduce the amount of time clients are required to stay in crisis and medium-term
accommodation. At the same time, without a stronger focus on effective service models that intervene early to prevent people from exiting into homelessness, and models that link support to long-term housing, it will be difficult to stop people cycling through the system.

Finally, resources are constrained. All levels of government face significant budget tightening and there is currently no Australian Government commitment to fund the NPAH beyond June 2013. This means that whatever service models are adopted, the SHS system needs to deliver the maximum outcomes from the available investment and ensure that resources are well targeted to match need. Some of the current resource allocation issues include:

- needs and profile of homeless people in different regions has changed over time
- lack of services in some locations and duplication of services in others
- impact of historical patterns of funding on the drift of homeless people to locations where there are more services
- limited flexibility to redistribute resources between regions.

In a climate of constrained resources, there’s a need to find ways to reduce the cost of administration so that more resources can be diverted to service delivery.

Given the funding constraints that government and SHS currently work under, reforms to address the current challenges facing the SHS system will require a shared commitment to improving homelessness services — both within the SHS system and through broader changes to mainstream, specialist support and housing assistance services to support the SHS system.

The alternative of ‘chipping away’ at the status quo is likely to be a downward spiral where clients are increasingly in holding patterns to minimise immediate harm and providers are increasingly unable to keep pace with demand for assistance.

The challenge for structural reform is to have all stakeholders working from the same ‘roadmap’ to deal with these issues, acknowledging the constraints that both governments and providers face and working together on the things that will make the biggest difference for homeless people.

2. Building blocks for reform

As a starting point for working with stakeholders to develop the roadmap for the future of the service system, a number of potential building blocks for reform have been identified. In each case, detailed development work will need to be undertaken with stakeholders to scope out effective and sustainable approaches, both for the building blocks outlined in this paper and for other reform elements identified through the consultation process. In addition, the development work will need to consider how any SHS reforms interact with other parts of the broader homelessness service system — for example, access arrangements for social housing, referrals to specialist support services and regional planning processes, and integration across government agencies.
2.1 Individualised approach

The first building block for system reform involves re-gearing delivery arrangements to support a greater focus on individualised approaches — with the intention of:

- providing greater flexibility for clients and service providers to match individual needs with the support provided — in order to develop solutions that will support client outcomes
- increasing client control over the decisions about the type of support they receive and the way services are provided
- providing greater portability of support arrangements that can evolve and move with the client as their needs change
- increasing responsiveness to client groups that are not getting what they need from the service system eg. Aboriginal people, families, young people
- increasing focus on outreach to prevent homelessness and to provide post-crisis support.

At present, SHS undertake individualised planning to develop client support plans but the flexibility of these plans and delivery arrangements is constrained by the service types they are funded under. For example, the majority of current funding is expended on short-and-medium term accommodation with support tied to the physical accommodation rather than as individualised funding tied to client needs.

SHS have already adopted a number of different approaches to delivering more individualised approaches including:

- outreach models focused on flexible support to prevent new cases of homelessness by supporting people in their own home or assisting them to move to more appropriate accommodation if required
- multi-disciplinary transitional case management that identifies housing and necessary supports, with crisis and medium-term accommodation organised where needed as part of the individualised support
- innovative ‘Housing First’ partnerships with social housing providers where the case management extends to post-crisis support.

While there is an increasing evidence base about ‘what works’, there is no accepted method to embed individualised approaches into sector-wide funding and delivery arrangements. This raises a number of questions:

- What range of individualised support ‘packages’ should be available to respond to the diversity of client needs (eg. primary, secondary, tertiary support packages)?
- How would any new approach ensure support arrangements reflect the different needs of young people, Aboriginal people, families, and women and children escaping domestic and family violence?
- How would decisions be made about the most appropriate support for specific types of ‘presenting need’, particularly given the current demand for crisis and medium-term accommodation?
- What other agencies are engaged with homeless clients and how do they interact with SHS and each other?
- What transitional arrangements are needed to re-balance service activities?
- What adjustment costs would SHS face in re-gearing service activities, both in terms of the infrastructure to ensure they align with new service models and the partnership arrangements needed to implement these models?
• How would any new approach ensure local and specialist experience of working with people facing homelessness is not lost?

Consultation questions

5. What are the opportunities to build on existing good practice in the SHS to implement individualised approaches?
6. What are the main design principles that need to be embedded in these individualised approaches?
7. What are the main implementation issues and risks that will need to be considered in developing individualised approaches?
8. What are the possible funding and delivery arrangements that would support implementation of individualised approaches?

2.2 Streamlined access

The second building block involves streamlining access and improving intake, assessment and referral arrangements so clients get the right services at the right time.

Ideally, streamlined access arrangements should ensure that:

• clients are able to seek the same support services regardless of how they entered the system (no wrong door)
• a consistent assessment is undertaken to determine the most appropriate support response, regardless of their first point of contact
• streamlined referrals are made to the most relevant SHS accommodation and/or support as needed, with appropriate arrangements for sharing client information.

At the local and regional level, individual services and groups of SHS are already involved in a range of initiatives to streamline client access and the HAP has funded a number of projects to improve the coordination of access arrangements.

However, embedding these practices across the service system raises a number of questions:

• What balance is needed between consistency while allowing for different service streams as well as local and regional responsiveness in access arrangements?
• What is needed to ensure access arrangements are sufficiently responsive to the specialist assessments required for different service streams — such as assessments of the needs of young people, Aboriginal people and women and children escaping domestic and family violence?
• What infrastructure and services are needed to support streamlined access — for example, a common assessment tool; state-wide referral system; state-wide telephone service; vacancy management system; service directory; sharing of client information?
• What adjustment costs could be faced by SHS in streamlining access arrangements — for example the costs associated with changing business systems and staff training?
Future directions for specialist homelessness services

Consultation questions

9. What are the opportunities to build on existing good practice in the SHS sector to build a streamlined access system?

10. What are the main design principles that need to be embedded in the SHS access system?

11. What are the main implementation issues and risks that will need to be considered in developing improved access arrangements?

2.3 Better planning and resource allocation

The third building block involves better planning and resource allocation arrangements that ensure:

• the distribution of available resources between regions reflects relative need for specialist homelessness services
• the distribution of available resources within regions reflects an appropriate balance between both different types of support (including preventative measures and post-crisis support) and different specialist service streams (adult, youth, Aboriginal, domestic and family violence)
• more flexible procurement arrangements that support partnership arrangements and reduce red tape.

There is already considerable work to build on. For example, the current Regional Homelessness Plans, the NSW 2021 Regional Action Plans which are under development, and current work to map homelessness services in NSW, will all inform a new approach to regional resource allocation.

At the same time, the detailed design of new planning and resource allocation arrangements will need to mitigate many of the same potential risks as the other reform elements, particularly in relation to maintaining the ability to respond to specialist and local needs. Key questions include:

• How should demand be measured, particularly for comparing relative demand in different regions, and for comparing relative demand between different target groups?
• What information needs to be considered to determine the regional mix of different types of client-centred support packages?
• What is needed to ensure planning and funding are sufficiently responsive to the specialist services provided under different service streams?
• What changes to procurement arrangements will support more effective regional collaboration and planning?
• What changes to procurement arrangements will support a reduction in red tape?
Consultation questions

12. What are the opportunities to build on existing regional planning and resource allocation processes?
13. What are the main design principles that need to be embedded in future planning and resource allocation arrangements?
14. How can services and consumers be better engaged in regional planning processes?
15. What are the main implementation issues and risks that will need to be considered in future planning and resource allocation arrangements?
16. What are the possible planning and procurement arrangements that would support better resource allocation decisions?

2.4 Promote and support quality improvement

The fourth building block involves promoting and supporting quality improvement in service provision using contemporary, evidence-based approaches to addressing homelessness.

Many services already follow a number of quality or regulatory frameworks. Nevertheless, an opportunity exists to build on these to get greater consistency across the sector.

Potential enablers of quality improvements include:

- quality assurance (either linked to existing quality standards or potentially to a National Quality Framework for homelessness services)
- better performance information
- performance-based contracting
- streamlined procurement arrangements to reduce red tape
- innovation funding to support new ways of working.

Consultation questions

17. What are the opportunities to build on existing quality improvement initiatives?
18. What are the priorities and actions that should be pursued to promote and support quality improvements?

2.5 Industry and workforce development

The fifth building block involves improving the structure, quality and contracting of services and ensuring that the sector has access to a skilled and stable workforce to deliver the types of services required under the reform.

FACS will work with the sector to develop industry and workforce development strategies that identify priorities and strategies for change. These strategies will be supported by industry and workforce development funding.
Future directions for specialist homelessness services

The actual strategies will be developed in consultation with the sector but could, for example, include:

- support for new types of industry or organisational models for delivering client-centred services, for example consortia or alliance models
- strengthening peak body arrangements so they can deliver capacity building activities needed to support SHS participation in the reform arrangements
- focusing on governance or management areas requiring development such as strategic or service planning
- building effective industry networks both across providers and with other parts of the homelessness service system.

Consultation questions

19. What are the opportunities to build on existing industry and workforce development initiatives?
20. What are the priorities and actions that should be funded under the Industry and Workforce Development Strategy?

3. Partnering with the sector

The Minister and the Department have been talking with stakeholders for some time about the need to improve the homelessness service system and what a reform program could include.

Successful SHS reform has to be done in partnership with the full range of stakeholders. Service providers, consumers and their representative bodies have to be fully involved in the design and development of any changes to the service system.

A range of consultative and engagement mechanisms are planned to guide the reform process and support its implementation.

The following is a broad structure of the governance and consultative mechanism for the reform program.
This structure includes engaging a range of stakeholders through:

**Engaging homeless people and consumers**

The voice and experience of homeless people and consumers will be front and centre of this reform. Consumers will have the opportunity to participate directly through consultation mechanisms as well as through their representatives in the structures outlined above. The Reform Team will also link in with existing consumer forums hosted and facilitated through peak bodies and homelessness services.

**Panel of experts**

A panel of experts with extensive expertise in the field of homelessness research, service delivery and leadership is also being established to:

- provide independent advice to the Minister, FACS Executive, the Sector Reference Group and the Reform Team
- share advice about the evidence base related to reform elements
- provide advice about the experience of homeless people
- provide advice about international best practice and innovative approaches to addressing homelessness
The panel will not have a formal meeting schedule but will be invited to participate in roundtables, forums and meetings as needed.

**Sector Reference Group**
The Sector Reference Group will comprise specialist homelessness services peak organisations and other relevant peak bodies. Those invited to participate include:

- Homelessness NSW
- Women’s Refuge Movement
- YFoundations
- Shelter NSW
- NSW Council of Social Service
- Federation of Community Housing Associations

Terms of Reference for the Sector Reference Group will be developed jointly with its members but its role will generally be to:

- provide strategic policy advice to the Minister, FACS Executive and the Reform Team
- represent the diverse views of the sector
- participate in the design and development of the reform program and its elements
- facilitate consultation with specialist homelessness services
- facilitate input from consumers of their member organisations
- share their expertise and experience in homelessness service reform
- assist in the development of options and help identify opportunities for improving the specialist homelessness service system.

**Working Groups**
Working Groups will be established to oversee key components of the reform work. A range of stakeholders who have specific knowledge and expertise in individual reform priorities will be invited to participate in the Working Groups. Members may include representatives from the Sector Reference Group, panel of experts and Specialist Homelessness Services. Membership may also include regional representatives such as Regional Homelessness Committee Chairs and FACS Directors of Partnership and Planning (DPPs), Specialist Homelessness Services and their clients.

**Linking with existing groups and forums**
Ongoing input from existing homelessness advisory, advocacy and planning groups will also be an important part of the reform consultation strategy. These include:

- NSW Premier’s Council on Homelessness
- Homelessness Interagency Committee
- NSW Homelessness Community Alliance
- Specialist Homelessness Service peak bodies
- Regional Homelessness Committees
- Regional Homelessness Forums.
Regional forums
A series of regional forums will take place during the reform process to brief services about the reform and seek their input.

4. How you can contribute
Peak bodies, service providers, homeless people, consumers of specialist homelessness services and other stakeholders are invited to comment on the strategic direction for homelessness service reform and provide feedback on the consultation questions presented in this paper.

Comments are invited before 31 August 2012 through:

• **Written comments:** to:
  SHS Reform Team
  Housing NSW
  Department of Family and Community Services
  223-229 Liverpool Rd
  Ashfield NSW 2131

• **Via email:** to goinghomestayinghome@facs.nsw.gov.au

• **By phone:** calling the Reform Team on 8753 9215

• **By participating in regional forums:** check the website for dates and details www.housing.nsw.gov.au

Other ways you can comment or participate:

• provide comments through your organisation, service provider or peak representative body
• talk to the chair of your Regional Homelessness Committee
• talk to your Director of Partnership and Planning in Community Services.

A contact list is available on the website.