

MEDIA RELEASE 7th March 2014

Federal funding uncertainty jeopardises successful WA homeless programs

Western Australian community service providers are worried about the future of a range of innovative and highly successful homelessness programs that have been turning around the lives of some of our most vulnerable individuals and families.

“With funding for the National Partnership Agreement on Homelessness (NPAH) due to run out in June the impacts are already being directly felt,” said Irina Cattalini, CEO of WACOSS today.

Those affected include services for those experiencing homelessness, women and children leaving violent situations, young people at risk who need support to engage with training and secure employment, those dealing with or recovering from mental health challenges or drug and alcohol problems, or those exiting prison and looking to start their lives anew.

This week 26 Western Australian services attended a meeting jointly hosted by WACOSS, ShelterWA and CHCWA to raise their concerns about the future of homeless services.

NPAH provided joint Commonwealth and State funding of \$135m over 4 years in WA to implement 20 programs involving 71 not-for-profit organisations. Over 6000 people experiencing or at immanent risk of homelessness benefited from the program in 2010-11 alone.

A review by the WA Auditor General found that most programs "met or exceeded client targets and the programs have made a positive difference to the people using them."

“Employers in the Community Services Sector and their staff are calling on the Federal Government to provide certainty around the funding of programmes” said John Bouffler, Executive Director of Community Employers WA today.

“It is unjust for employers and employees in these successful services to be left in limbo. Employers want to retain expert staff while employees are seeking clarity on their future job prospects. We are calling on the Federal Government to make some urgent decisions and inform all stakeholders. If further reviews are required, the Minister should extend funding for 6-12 months while working with the sector to progress further reforms,” he said.

Recent research by the Centre for Social Impact at UWA and the Australian Housing and Urban Research Institute (AHURI) clearly demonstrated that the cost to the community of not providing services to those who are homeless (through for instance additional health and justice costs) is actually much higher, by on average \$3685 per person per year.

“By enabling an innovative and collaborative approach to linking up services and supports, the range of programs delivered under NPAH have been able to deliver more successful outcomes for some of our most vulnerable people and reduce the cost to the community,” said Ms Cattalini.

“These joined-up services are able to deliver more successful life-changing outcomes, meaning individuals and families at risk of long-term disadvantage are able to secure stable long-term outcomes in housing, employment and life. The savings to the community are likely to be much, much greater in the longer term,” said Mr Bouffler.

In the lead up to International Women’s Day on Saturday, community organisations delivering women’s and family violence services around Australia have highlighted how funding uncertainty is undermining their ability to keep women and children safe.

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