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The Role of Local Government in Addressing Homelessness

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A Tool Kit for Local Government

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A Tool Kit

for councils exploring opportunities in housing and homelessness

Local government is recognised as the tier of government closest to the people of Australia (Megarrity 2011). It provides a range of services that underpin the management of our cities, contributes to the wellbeing of our communities through the provision of infrastructure and services and undertakes important regulatory roles. To date, councils have assumed a diverse mix of roles and responsibilities in housing and homelessness across Australia.

This Tool Kit builds upon the national and international evidence presented in the first report, *The Role of Local Government in Homelessness: Literature Review* (Beer & Prance 2012) and aims to improve our understanding of what constitutes good practice in the sector. The Literature Review is publicly available and accessible from the Australian Homelessness Clearinghouse.¹ Material from six case study sites, an online survey of current Local Government practices and seven policymaker workshops informed the Final Report and guided the development of this Tool Kit.

The Tool Kit aims to provide councils with an introduction to the ways local governments can reconsider their engagement with homelessness and build more effective responses. These guidelines are especially designed for those councils who do not have significant experience in this area, as well as those wishing to expand their engagement with the homelessness sector. The strategies suggested here are informed by best practice nationally and internationally, however, the Tool Kit does not intend to comprehensively document all best practice initiatives. We have attempted to ensure that the usefulness of this Tool Kit is not compromised over time or changing policy contexts.

It is important to note that the Commonwealth and State Governments have the primary role for funding and providing services to assist people who are homeless or at risk of homelessness. This Tool Kit does not suggest that local governments could take on an unfunded mandate or begin homelessness services provision. Rather, this Tool Kit is intended to guide councils through the process of reconsidering their formal policies, internal procedures, research and advocacy in relation to homelessness.

The form of this Tool Kit, and its possible use via the web or in hardcopy, reflects advice received from local governments while undertaking this research. **This document is short, directive and seeks to open up thinking to a wide range of possibilities.**

Broadly, seven factors are considered vital for a successful homelessness policy within local government. According to the US Interagency Council on Homelessness, these are (2003: 18):

- 1) Collaborative planning process;
- 2) Research and data-driven approach;
- 3) Performance and outcome orientation;
- 4) Innovation and creativity;
- 5) Endorsement by elected Councillors;
- 6) Involvement of stakeholders; and
- 7) Monitoring and evaluation of implementation.

These factors should be kept in mind whilst using this Tool Kit and referred to throughout the process of designing a homelessness response.

We have incorporated these elements into the five phases outlined below. Within each phase, a number of steps are detailed to give more in-depth information about the necessary actions.

¹ www.homelessnessclearinghouse.govspace.gov.au

Review Phase

- Understanding the local triggers of homelessness;
- Mapping current homelessness initiatives in local government; focusing upon prevention, accommodation and support services;
- Identifying available resources and funding streams; and,
- Identifying stakeholders.

Planning Phase

- Research;
- Agreeing upon the type of homelessness that is going to be addressed; and,
- Evaluating existing policies and strategy documents.

Decision Phase

- Internal debate;
- External consultations; and,
- Commit.

Implementation Phase

- Formal policy;
- Informal strategies;
- Public accessibility; and,
- Monitoring and evaluation.

Promotion Phase

- Informing internal council staff;
- Sharing with the wider community; and,
- Educating other councils.

Review

Councils who are thinking about beginning or expanding their work in the homelessness sector could commence with a review that specifically focusses upon the nature, incidence and dimensions of homelessness within their local government. Developing a good understanding of the problem is vital to developing effective policies. An evidence-based approach to homelessness is needed to not only demonstrate the need for intervention, but also to inform the development of options and the identification of a preferred solution.

Before the review commences, a Working Group/Steering Committee can be formed. The Working Group will be responsible for co-ordinating the planning process and could include representation from stakeholders. Individuals chosen for the Working Group could have authority to make funding and resource decisions; have relevant experience or expertise; be committed to the duration of the planning process; and be well respected by stakeholders and the broader community. A Working Group “Chair” person could be selected who reports directly to the Chief Executive Officer.

The Review phase outlined here could capture information about the:

- 1) Triggers of homelessness;
- 2) Activities that are carried out to assist those in need, paying particular attention to preventative measures, accommodation options and support services;
- 3) Potential resources; and,
- 4) Relevant stakeholders.

Potential information sources for each stage in the review process are sketched below. The aim of the Review phase is to collate high quality information from a variety of sources, as this is essential for good quality policymaking.

1. Understanding local homelessness triggers

Stage One in the Review process could focus upon understanding local homelessness triggers.

Useful sources of data on potential homelessness in the local government may include:

- Information obtained from homeless and other services;
- Estimates of people staying with friends/family on an insecure basis or couch surfing;
- Local advice services on homelessness cases;
- ABS data;
- Estimates of rough sleeper numbers undertaken annually by State Government or community groups;
- Information on homeless families with children;
- Data on young people leaving State care/protection;
- Records available from hostels and refuges; and,
- Records of asylum seekers being accommodated by emergency housing providers.

Some groups of people are likely to be more at risk of homelessness than others. During the Review Phase, particular attention could be given to understanding which vulnerable groups

in the community require targeted assistance. These may include:

- Young people who have become disconnected from their family; have been in care; have a history of abuse or whose parents have had mental health, alcohol or drug problems;
- People from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds (CALD);
- People who have been “institutionalised” for a period of time; such as being under the guardianship of the Minister;
- Women and children escaping domestic violence;
- People who suffer from poor mental or physical health; and,
- Those affected by drug and alcohol abuse.

As part of the process of mapping and understanding the extent of homelessness in the local government, housing authorities may wish to develop a profile of those who have experienced homelessness. Elements within a profile may include:

- Location of homelessness;
- Reason(s) for homelessness;
- Housing history, including previous tenures and length of homelessness;
- Ethnic background;
- Age;
- Gender and sexuality;
- Disabilities;
- Levels and types of debts;
- Employment/benefits history;
- Composition of the household;
- Support service needs;
- Health/drug problems; and,
- Immigration status.

2. Mapping current activities

The second stage in the Council’s effort to review homelessness within the local government could focus upon identifying current preventative measures, accommodation options and support services.

2.a Mapping initiatives to prevent homelessness

Many statutory and non-statutory services can contribute to preventing homelessness. A broad range of organisations operating in fields other than housing specifically can be involved in efforts to prevent homelessness. Activities that contribute to preventing homelessness may include:

- Advice services;
- Mediation and reconciliation services;
- Tenancy support schemes;
- Rent deposit/guarantee schemes;
- Management of social housing by the State Housing Authority;
- Debt counselling; and,
- Social services for vulnerable people.

2.b Mapping accommodation options

Local governments could acknowledge that a range of accommodation options are needed for people who are, or may become, homeless. Landlords, accommodation providers and housing developers across all sectors can contribute to the provision of accommodation. Activities that contribute to securing accommodation that will be available for people who are homeless, or at risk of becoming homeless, may include:

- Initiatives to increase the supply of new affordable accommodation in the district;
- Provision of new housing for owner occupation;
- Initiatives to increase the supply of specialist and /or supported accommodation;
- Provision of accommodation by the State Housing Authority or community housing provider;
- Programmes for the provision of hostel, foyer and refuge spaces;
- Initiatives to maximise use of the private rental sector; and,
- Local/regional/national mobility schemes.

In some instances, some forms of emergency housing cannot be mapped. For example, information about emergency housing for the victims of domestic violence may not be available in order to protect clients. Understanding that these services are available and where the phone numbers for these services can be obtained would be sufficient.

2.c Mapping available support services

Local governments could consider which current activities contribute to the provision of support for people in the district who are, or may become, homeless. Relevant support services may include:

- Social services support for children who require accommodation;
- Social services support for young people at risk;
- Housing advice services;
- Tenancy support services;
- Day centres/drop in centres for homeless people
- Supported hostel provision;
- Women's refuges;
- Support for people to access health care services;
- Support for people with problems of alcohol or substance abuse;
- Support for people with mental health problems;
- Support for people with learning disabilities;
- Support for people seeking employment; and,
- Advocacy support.

3. Identify available resources and funding streams

As part of the homelessness review, councils may consider the available resources. The Council could examine both its own resources and those available from other public authorities, voluntary organisations and the private sector. Other bodies that may contribute to preventing homelessness and have additional funds could include:

- Housing co-operatives or associations;
- Housing Corporations;
- Supported housing providers;
- Home improvement agencies;

- Local mental health organisations;
- Local disability groups;
- Children's Trusts;
- Youth services and youth advice groups;
- Education welfare services;
- Schools;
- The Police;
- Drug action teams;
- Victim support groups;
- Refugee community organisations;
- Law centres;
- Faith groups;
- Women's groups;
- Ethnic minority groups;
- Emergency accommodation providers;
- Day centres for homeless people;
- Mediation services;
- Local businesses/Chambers of Commerce; and,
- Asylum support services.

4. Identify Stakeholders

Developing an understanding of local homelessness triggers and mapping the current responses (including prevention, accommodation and support services) will provide a good indication of the stakeholders who are currently working to end homelessness and reduce its impact on those already affected. Broad support and participation from the public, private and non-profit sectors is recognised as essential for creating a holistic local government response to homelessness. Involvement of all stakeholders in policy development and evaluation is important in order to pool expertise and develop a capacity for tackling homelessness.

Step 4 of the Review process could subsequently involve documenting a thorough list of stakeholders. Stakeholders worth considering include:

- Mayor and Chief Executive Officer;
- State/Federal Government Departments;
- Business and civil leaders;
- Law enforcement officials;
- Chambers of Commerce;
- Housing developers and service providers;
- Hospital administrators;
- Individuals experiencing homelessness;
- Non-profit foundations;
- Faith-based organisations; and
- General public.

The Review Phase aims to capture information about the extent of homelessness in the local government and build a picture about current responses. This data will help council identify policy and service provision gaps and start a conversation about the best way the council can add value to a whole of government homelessness response.

Plan

The Planning Phase aims to collate all relevant homelessness information and policy details. Accurate, timely data and research will create a solid foundation for decision making in the next phase. Location specific information from the Review Phase may be combined with more general information about the homelessness sector. This phase involves:

- 1) Broad research;
- 2) Agreeing upon the type or dimension of homelessness that is going to be addressed; and,
- 3) Evaluating existing policies and strategy documents.

1. Research

Compiling information from a broad range of sources will ensure that councils are informed about the range of response options available to local governments in Australia and the strengths and weaknesses of each approach. Councils may aim to develop a picture of homelessness within their jurisdiction. The local government could ensure that staff apply evidence-based solutions to partnerships in policy, advocacy and service provision.

Research could also focus upon identifying relevant challenges that may limit the capacity for council to effectively engage with the homelessness sector. Issues commonly recognised include:

- 1) Lack of information on current services working in the area;
- 2) Limited opportunities for homeless people themselves to express their experiences;
- 3) Lack of information on new/emerging models of service and approaches to working with the homeless;
- 4) Limited number of partnerships between stakeholders in the area; and,
- 5) Inadequate ideas about what should/could be done to address the issues and who should be responsible (Kyle, 2009: 42).

At the same time, council may look to “best practice” examples to inspire and inform their approach to homelessness. Local governments recognised for a “best practice” have agreed upon a number of principles that form the basis of their homelessness policy/strategies. Principles that are worth considering include:

- A right to shelter;
- Regulating the use of public spaces;
- A commitment to ongoing research and policy development;
- Demonstrating community leadership;
- Maintaining an advocacy role;
- Facilitating social inclusion; and,
- Respectfully responding to diversity within the homeless population.

Adopting a human-rights based approach when responding to people experiencing homelessness is also considered “best practice”. The approach promotes *access to decent*,

stable housing as the indispensable precondition for the exercise of most other fundamental human rights and aims to reduce discrimination against people experiencing homelessness in the local government. A rights-based approach acknowledges the interdependence of housing and other rights, such as the right to live in dignity and the right to health. The approach encourages the use of international treaties on housing rights as a basis for developing a homeless strategy.

Suggested information sources include:

- Australian Homelessness Clearing House;
- Australian Housing and Urban Research Institute;
- Centre for Housing, Urban, Regional Planning (CHURP);
- Australian Bureau of Statistics; and,
- The Australian homelessness sector's peak journal, *Parity*.

Peak bodies that are worth investigating include:

- Homelessness Australia;
- Council to Homeless Persons;
- Council of Social Services;
- National Shelter; and,
- Australian Housing Institute.

The City of Melbourne, like many capital city councils in Australia, recognises the importance of up-to-date information for effectively responding to homelessness. As a result, the council undertakes a number of additional research initiatives that aim to keep them informed about homelessness in Melbourne. These include:

- An annual street count of rough sleepers;
- Working with local service networks to understand service delivery gaps;
- Undertaking independent research to better understand the profile of rooming house residents;
- Establishing a network of service providers in rooming houses;
- Working closely with the crisis accommodation sector to ensure supply meets demand; and,
- Aiming to host a homelessness summit to better understand the issue of homelessness in Victoria.



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2. Agree

It is important that in developing a response, local governments agree upon a definition of homelessness and the type of homelessness it will address. During this stage, the Working Group could establish the policy aims and objectives. Objectives must be enunciated so that it is clear what the policy is intending to achieve. In defining the objectives it is also useful to outline associated inputs and indicators to measure progress.

Based on a cultural conception of homelessness, the ABS distinguishes between three categories of homelessness. **Primary homelessness** includes all people without conventional accommodation, such as people living on the streets, sleeping in parks, squatting in derelict buildings, using cars or railway carriages for temporary shelter. **Secondary homelessness** includes people who move frequently from one form of temporary accommodation to another. On census night, it includes all people staying in emergency or transitional accommodation provided under the SAAP. Secondary homelessness also includes people residing temporarily with other households because they have no accommodation of their own and people staying in boarding houses on a short-term basis; operationally defined as 12 weeks or less. **Tertiary homelessness** refers to people who live in boarding houses on a medium to long term basis; operationally defined as 13 weeks or longer. They are considered homeless because their accommodation situation is below the minimum community standard of a small self-contained flat (Australian Government, 2009: 9).

Once the Working Group has agreed upon the definition of homelessness, the group needs to agree upon the type of homelessness or the homeless population it will assist. Typically, councils choose to focus upon helping rough sleepers in the local government. However local governments often have significant interactions with boarding/rooming houses and tourist caravan parks. The Working Group could consider working in partnership with these temporary accommodation options to ensure that homeless people don't suffer as a result of changing government policies or enforcing legislation/regulations. For example, the City of Melbourne's homelessness policy focusses upon supporting people who are in the primary or tertiary categories of homelessness because this approach minimises duplication with other levels of government (City of Melbourne, 2011: 13).

3. Evaluate existing policies and strategy documents

Local governments are somewhat constricted because their powers and responsibilities are determined by relevant State Government legislation and their budgets are modest at best. Local Government can only perform those functions established under State legislation and especially; the relevant Local Government Act (Purdon, 1992 p. 41). Nevertheless, local governments hold ancillary powers that can be important for the homeless population with

respect to their access to, and use of, public open space, the regulation of boarding houses and the co-ordination of services.

Local governments should review their existing powers and their potentially negative impact on the homeless. Where possible, such powers and/or by-laws should be removed or modified. Local governments should also examine how their existing policies and procedures could be used to produce positive outcomes for the homeless.

Existing council policies and strategy documents could be reviewed, being mindful of homelessness. Particular attention could be paid to social plans, community wellbeing studies, community development frameworks, public space management regulations and bylaws. The Working Group may aim to understand how these social policies impact upon those experiencing homelessness and how they could be reformed to better assist those in need.

The Planning Phase builds upon work undertaken during the Review Phase. This second phase aims to collate all relevant homelessness information, assess existing policies and agree upon a homelessness definition and target group. These steps must be completed before the Working Group can decide upon the best way to move forward and implement a revised approach to homelessness.



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Decide

Once all available information has been reviewed, the Working Group and council need to decide whether it's best to introduce a formal homelessness policy or a number of informal strategies. This decision process may include internal debate and external consultation/s. Once a decision has been reached, it is recommended that council formally commits to this new approach.

1. Internal Debate

The Working Group could begin by identifying an extensive list of policy options or possible solutions. This could include not only conventional solutions, but also innovative ideas that reflect the circumstances of that place. Whilst the options could be described in broad terms, each option could clearly outline:

- 1) How it will be achieved or contribute to the policy goal;
- 2) How it fits with existing or planned policies and any existing requirements and obligations on those who might be affected;
- 3) How it could be delivered; and,
- 4) Indicative costs.

Only those options which meet the basic requirements of the policy and appear to offer a practical solution may be considered in further detail. Realistic options could be short-listed and examined further. The number of options shortlisted will vary and could be tested against either the status quo or the "do nothing" scenarios.

Each option needs to be considered against the associated costs, benefits and risks. It is also important to consider the resources and competencies of delivery bodies/agencies because policies which cannot be implemented are of no benefit. The constraints on delivery and the culture or capacity for change within the sector/institution are also worth considering. A majority of councils will already be very familiar with the techniques used for this step in the policymaking cycle. As a result, we have simply flagged that each policy option can be broken down into three broad steps:

1. Identify and quantify the monetary costs and benefits of each option;
2. Identify the risks in relation to implementation and costs; and,
3. In light of the identified risks, adjust the monetary costs and benefits for 'optimism bias'.

Having detailed the options, the next stage is to identify the preferred option or options. Assessing the options involves considering how they will work in practice and what the challenges to implementation will be. The appraisal could consider results from the cost/benefit analysis, assessment of risks and the wider impacts of the policy in order to identify the best way forward. As part of the appraisal local governments need to consider information from the Review and Plan phases and community consultation feedback. The aim of the appraisal is to identify which option offers an effective outcome with regard to the policy objectives, compared with the best value for money achievable.

2. External consultation

Once the policy options have been shortlisted by the Working Group, two or three preferred options could be made publicly available for debate and comment. In particular, the views and advice of people experiencing homelessness may be sought and given serious consideration.

Most local governments already use a community consultation guideline or philosophy. The comments below highlight the important elements of a community consultation program more generally.

The formal consultation process could include a written consultation document that is as simple and concise as possible. It could include a summary of the main issues/questions it seeks views on. The document could be set out in plain language and technical details should be limited. Supporting documents may set out the main information and competing arguments relevant to the final decision; or where they can be found.

It should be easy for readers to respond, make contact or complain. Details may be given of a contact person who can respond to consultees' questions. Similar details may be given of someone who will pursue complaints or comments regarding the consultation/community engagement process.

Council may seek to raise awareness among the public and relevant groups about the consultation exercise. This may include:

- 1) Press releases;
- 2) Prominent advertisements in the general press and specialist press of affected groups;
- 3) The Internet; and,
- 4) Direct invitations to key stakeholder groups.

The consultation process could aim to be both meaningful and inclusive. This means that all persons likely to be affected by, or having an interest in, the policy have the opportunity to engage with the council and participate in the policymaking process.

Responses to the consultation should be carefully and objectively analysed. The results could be made widely available and detail an account of the views expressed, the policy makers response to those views and reasons for decisions finally taken. Where possible, all responses should be acknowledged on receipt. Accurate and complete records should be kept of all responses received; whether through a formal written consultation or more interactive engagement strategies.

3. Commit

A strong commitment from the Mayor and Council staff is critical for the success of either a formal policy or informal strategies. Planning to end homelessness requires local government commitment from the first planning steps to full implementation, staff time and energy, willingness to engage diverse stakeholders and forge new partnerships and the ability to think creatively about old problems and existing resources. Commitment from local government to help end homelessness is an important pre-requisite before actions can proceed.

The Decision Phase requires the Working Group to decide whether a formal homelessness policy or informal set of strategies is the most appropriate strategy. The process involves internal debate, external consultation and a formal commitment from the Council, outlining the Council's revised approach to homelessness.

Implement

Having carried out a review of homelessness within the local government, undertaken all the steps in the Planning Phase and made a decision about the best way forward in consultation with a broad stakeholder group, the Working Group can implement the homelessness strategy. The strategy could include specific objectives to be achieved and actions planned to be taken by council. Ideally, the strategy will also articulate the roles and responsibilities of other stakeholders; such as the State/Federal Government, front line service providers and voluntary organisations and how all parties will work together.

High-level strategies and goals must be translated into concrete action steps to help ensure they are achieved. Action plans could include specific activities and parties responsible for executing them, costs and funding sources, timelines/benchmarks and performance metrics. A pragmatic approach could be used to formulate the action plans. This means that objectives should be realistic and achievable and be accompanied by a clear time line.

A **formal homelessness policy** would ideally include action plans specifically addressing prevention, accommodation options and support services. Strategies to end chronic homelessness fall into two broad categories: prevention and intervention. Prevention plans aim to reduce the number of people who become chronically homeless whereas intervention policies aim to increase the services and support for people who are already experiencing homelessness and help them transition into stable and appropriate accommodation. Specific actions to support a “prevention” policy include centralised funding and service delivery to increase coordination; dedicated resources to house individuals discharged from health institutions and discharge planning protocols to prevent people exiting into homelessness. Intervention policies may include assertive outreach teams, emergency accommodation, soup kitchens and permanent supported housing options.

Internal homelessness strategies could draw on political support or approval of elected Council members. Informal strategies can be developed that guide staff practices and act as a source of information. Elements of an internal homelessness strategy many include:

- Information training sessions for council park rangers;
- Designing an internal work flow pattern when homeless people present at council offices;
- Creating an information brochure of available homelessness front line services for the general public;
- Assuming a greater advocacy role;
- Convening a regional networking event or round-table for information sharing between homeless service providers; and,
- Granting associated community groups more ready access to council services, such as community centres and transport.

1. Be publicly accessible

Regardless of whether the Working Group decides to implement a formal homelessness policy or set of informal strategies, information should be publicly accessible. In particular, if the council proceeds with a formal homelessness strategy, the Working Group could make a copy of the strategy available to the public at their principal office and where possible, on the Internet.

2. Undergo frequent review and evaluation

The homelessness plan and strategies could act as a guide for council activities into the future. At the same time, the document may be considered a “living” document that is updated as circumstances change over time. Keeping the document up to date could involve regularly tracking community progress, maintaining an innovative approach and staying informed of activities in other councils. Encouraging ongoing stakeholder and community input and building new partnerships are also important elements of reviewing the homelessness plan/strategies.

The Implementation Phase requires the Working Group to decide whether council is going to adopt a formal homelessness policy or a number of informal strategies. Action plans could be developed to help achieve the identified goals and objectives. The council's new approach to homelessness should be publicly accessible and undergo frequent review and evaluation; regardless of whether a formal or informal approach is adopted. All invested parties should be actively involved throughout the Implementation Phase.



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Promote

It is important that the Working Group promotes the council's new approach to homelessness both internally and externally. Councils could try to improve awareness and understanding about the role of local governments in addressing homelessness. Advertising the diversity of local government involvement with the homelessness sector could encourage other councils to reconsider their engagement with homelessness, improve community understanding of the homelessness problem and help those in housing stress access assistance.

1. Promote internally

Once the formal policy or internal strategies have been finalised, the Working Group could invest significant time and energy ensuring that council staff are familiar with the new initiatives. This will help ensure that the policy/strategies are 'taken up' and used effectively. Council staff should know who to contact if they have further questions or would like more information/need assistance. There is a need to inform and advocate with members of council. Councillors may have a limited understanding of homelessness, its causes, impacts and management challenges. There is therefore a need to enhance their awareness in order to prepare the way for more effective action.

2. Publicly promote

The Council's homelessness plan could be publicly endorsed and announced by the Mayor to ensure maximum visibility. *Advertising the plan is an opportunity to raise the profile of this issue and the capacity of local governments to make a positive contribution.* Advertising the council's positive response to a difficult issue demonstrates local government's leadership within the community and its capacity to shape its own future. This may also help to ensure that the plan is "taken up" and implemented by council. Strategies to publicise the plan could include:

- Hosting a special press conference;
- Leveraging print, TV and radio media to maximise press coverage;
- Encouraging participating stakeholders and organisations to actively promote the plan; and,
- Enlisting the support of community leaders to spread the word.



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3. Promote amongst other councils.

Promoting the success and challenges associated with developing a homelessness strategy provides a great resource for other councils starting to get involved with homelessness or looking to change the nature of their engagement. Councils could be encouraged to share their practical experiences and “lead by example”. Establishing regional networks of councils working in homelessness or pursuing a number of pilot studies would also serve as a useful mechanism for promoting best practice with respect to homelessness.

The final phase of this tool kit recommends promoting the council’s new approach to homelessness. The Working Group could ensure that internal staff, the public and other councils are aware of the council’s homelessness strategy because this will help to encourage the uptake of “best practice” approaches to homelessness.



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Conclusions and lessons learned

This report builds upon national and international evidence presented in the first report, *The Role of Local Government in Homelessness: Literature Review* and *The Role of Local Government in Homelessness: Final Report*. The recommendations here are informed by material from six case study sites, an online survey of current Local Government practices and seven policymaker workshops around Australia. The Tool Kit aims to draw upon “best practice” principles to assist local governments reconsider their engagement with homelessness and design a new approach.

The key message of this Tool Kit is that *local governments can make a difference without having to make large financial contributions or take on new responsibilities*. We encourage councils to consider how they deal with difficult issues within the community and demonstrate their leadership locally. In considering those who are homeless, councils could work to implement mindful responses that acknowledge realities, while working for better outcomes.

The five separate phases outlined here may help councils reconsider their role in the homelessness sector and draw upon “best practice” principles to develop an innovative approach to help end homelessness. A Working Group could be formed before this process commences to provide leadership throughout the project. The steps involved in each phase are sketched below:

The **Review Phase** involves:

- Understanding the local triggers of homelessness;
- Mapping current homelessness initiatives in the local government; focussing upon prevention, accommodation and support services;
- Identifying available resources and funding streams; and,
- Identifying stakeholders.

The **Planning Phase** involves:

- Research;
- Agreeing upon the type of homelessness that is going to be addressed; and,
- Evaluating existing policies and strategy documents.

The **Decision Phase** involves:

- Internal Debate;
- External consultations; and,
- Commit.

The **Implementation Phase** involves:

- Formal policy;
- Informal strategies;
- Public accessibility; and,
- Monitoring and evaluation.

The **Promotion Phase** involves:

- Informing internal council staff;
- Sharing with the wider community; and,
- Sharing experience and learning with other councils.

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Australian Government
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and Indigenous Affairs**

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