

Regional Homelessness Action Plan 2010 – 2014

Illawarra



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The development of Regional Homelessness Actions Plans has been funded by the Australian Government and the NSW Government through the National Partnership Agreement on Homelessness

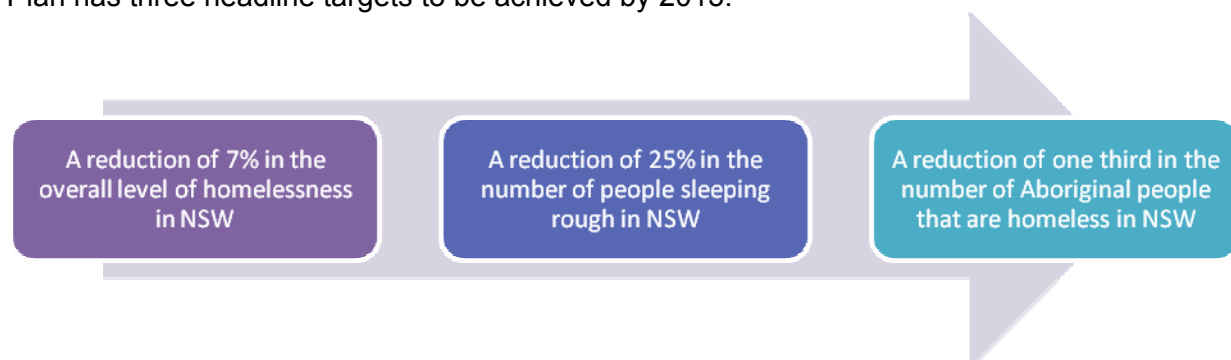
1 REGIONAL HOMELESSNESS ACTION PLANS - OVERVIEW

Regional Homelessness Action Plans (RHAP) are the regional implementation mechanism for the *NSW Homelessness Action Plan*. The *NSW Homelessness Action Plan* sets the direction for state-wide reform of the homelessness service system to achieve better outcomes for people who are homeless or at risk of homelessness.

The NSW Homelessness Action Plan is based around three strategic directions:

1. **Preventing homelessness: to ensure that people never become homeless**
2. **Responding effectively to homelessness: to ensure that people who are homeless do not become entrenched in the system**
3. **Breaking the cycle: to ensure that people who have been homeless do not become homeless again**

Consistent with the National Partnership on Homelessness, the NSW Homelessness Action Plan has three headline targets to be achieved by 2013:



Actions to address homelessness take account of different forms of homelessness:

- **Primary homelessness.** Primary homelessness applies when a person lives on the street, sleeps in parks, squats in derelict buildings, or uses cars or railway carriages for temporary shelter.
- **Secondary homelessness.** Secondary homelessness is used to describe people who move frequently from one form of temporary shelter to another. Secondary homelessness applies to people using emergency accommodation, youth refuges or women's refuges, people residing temporarily with relatives or with friends (because they have no accommodation of their own), and people using boarding houses on an occasional or intermittent basis (up to 12 weeks).
- **Tertiary homelessness.** Tertiary homelessness is used to describe people who live in premises where they don't have the security of a lease guaranteeing them accommodation, nor access to basic private facilities (such as a private bathroom, kitchen or living space). It can include people living in boarding houses on a medium to long-term basis (more than 13 weeks) or in caravan parks.

Through the *NSW Homelessness Action Plan* and *Regional Homelessness Action Plans* the NSW Government will realign existing effort, increasing the focus of the service system on prevention and early intervention and long-term accommodation and support.

The RHAP should be read in conjunction with:

- *The NSW Homelessness Action Plan*
- *Regional Homelessness Action Plan Planning Framework*
- *National Partnership Agreement on Homelessness*
- *National Partnership on Homelessness NSW Implementation Plan 2009-2013.*

2 SCOPE OF REGIONAL HOMELESSNESS ACTION PLANS

The NSW Homelessness Action Plan identifies a number of strategies and actions aimed at implementing reform directions in relation to preventing homelessness and moving responses to homelessness towards a greater emphasis on long term housing with support rather than crisis accommodation. A key aim of Regional Homelessness Action Plans is to translate these reform directions into action at the regional level.

Experience suggests that the most effective homelessness plans combine approaches to addressing systemic issues while also supporting place-based initiatives that take account of local homelessness needs. Best practice in the national and international context also suggests that the most effective responses to homelessness involve a collaborative local plan – a framework that guides community-wide efforts to prevent homelessness, provide appropriate support to people who become homeless and stop people from re-entering the homeless system.

Regional Homelessness Actions Plans have been developed to identify effective ways of working locally to respond to local homelessness issues. Regional Homelessness Actions Plans also include local level implementation mechanisms for State-level policy responses to support reform of the homelessness service system as well as regionally-specific projects that reflect the characteristics of local homelessness, informed by evidence about successful strategies.

Regional Homelessness Actions Plans have been developed in the NSW Regional Coordination Program (RCP) regions. There are ten Regional Homelessness Action Plans in NSW, one in each of the nine Regional Coordination Program Regions, with two plans for Western region – Riverina/Murray and Western NSW. RHAPs have been developed in:

1. Central Coast
2. Coastal Sydney
3. Greater Western Sydney
4. Hunter
5. Illawarra
6. New England/North West
7. North Coast
8. South East
9. Riverina/Murray
10. Western NSW

Regional Homelessness Action Plans cover a four year period, 2010-2014.

2.1 REGIONAL HOMELESSNESS ACTION PLAN OBJECTIVES

Regional Homelessness Action Plans aim to:

1. Identify actions for implementation at the regional level that reflect the principles and reform directions of the *NSW Homelessness Action Plan*
2. Ensure that identified actions reflect the particular characteristics of homelessness in the region and build on successful local strategies and partnerships
3. Identify regional projects for funding under the National Partnership on Homelessness for 2010-2013.

Regional Homelessness Action Plans also aim to play a number of other roles:

- Supporting the implementation of local priorities and actions
- Facilitating regional service reform and more integrated service system responses
- Providing a process to document effective local approaches to add to the evidence base
- Providing a tool to collect regional homelessness data and descriptions of the service system
- Building cross sector and cross agency cooperation in responding to homelessness and contributing to raising the profile of homelessness as a central concern for the community

2.2 REGIONAL HOMELESSNESS ACTION PLAN WORKSHOPS

In NSW no one agency is responsible for delivering responses to homelessness, rather a wide range of agencies and services are part of the homelessness service system including:

- **Specialist homelessness services** with expertise in providing crisis and ongoing support services to homeless people.
- **Specialist services** providing support for people with particular issues such as mental health issues or drug and alcohol issues or disability.
- **Mainstream services** used by everyone in the community and provided predominantly by government agencies.

To support the regional planning process, representatives from across the homelessness service system were invited to participate in Regional Homelessness Action Planning Workshops. An electronic submission process was also available for stakeholders who were unable to attend workshops.

Workshops were held in each of the RCP regions, with two workshops held in Western region. Four Aboriginal specific workshops were held in:

- Coastal Sydney
- Greater Western Sydney
- North Coast
- Western NSW

The workshops focused on identifying:

- priority homelessness target groups in the region
- issues and gaps in the regional service system within a homelessness reform context
- existing effective responses and initiatives to homelessness in the region that could be expanded or duplicated

- key strategic actions and partnerships to support reform directions at the regional level
- potential projects for funding under years 2 to 4 of the National Partnership Agreement on Homelessness

The workshop outcomes and comments received through the submission process were key inputs into the development of the Regional Homelessness Action Plan. Plans will be further refined by Regional Homelessness Committees, over the four year implementation period.

2.3 REGIONAL HOMELESSNESS COMMITTEES

Regional Homelessness Committees have been established to support the development and implementation of Regional Homelessness Action Plans. Regional Homelessness Committees will operate for the duration of the NSW Homelessness Action Plan.

Regional Homelessness Committees will act as a point of referral for existing local homelessness committees and interagency groups on systemic issues. Local committees and groups will also provide advice and information to Regional Homelessness Committees on local service provision and emerging issues.

Regional Homelessness Committees are chaired by Housing NSW and include representation from government, the non-government sector and the broader community. Regional Homelessness Committees will report to the NSW Homelessness Interagency Committee on the implementation of Regional Homelessness Action Plans. This role will include the identification of systemic issues that require consideration and action at regional and central policy levels.

The NSW Homelessness Interagency Committee is a State-level multi government agency group chaired by Housing NSW. It includes the key agencies in the Human Services, Justice and Attorney General's, Health, Education and Premier and Cabinet Departments. The Committee reports to the Justice and Human Services Chief Executive Officers Group and is responsible for coordinating the implementation of the NSW Homelessness Action Plan and the National Partnership on Homelessness NSW Implementation Plan.

Illawarra Regional Homelessness Committee

The Illawarra Regional Homelessness Committee includes representatives from the following agencies and organisations:

Housing NSW (HNSW)	Geoff Woods (Chair) Nina Knott (Assessment Coordinator) June Lowe (Senior Aboriginal Project Officer) Kate Vasey (Team Leader, Shoalhaven)
Community Services (CS)	Jelena Mealey
Southern Youth & Family Services (SYFS)	Narelle Clay
The Housing Trust	Jenny Stewart
Wollongong Emergency Family Housing (WEFH)	Julie Mitchell
Wollongong Women's Refuge	Kathy Colyer
South East Sydney and Illawarra Area Health Service (SESIAHS)	Adrienne Lucey
Argyle Housing	Lesley Oatley
Southern Cross Community Housing	Marg Kaszo
Community Housing	Jo Belford
Murra Mia	Seth Merritt
Aboriginal Housing Office (AHO)	Jenny Brown
Legal Aid	Sharlene Naismith

3 ILLAWARRA HOMELESSNESS PROFILE

3.1 OVERVIEW

The Illawarra region includes five LGAs:

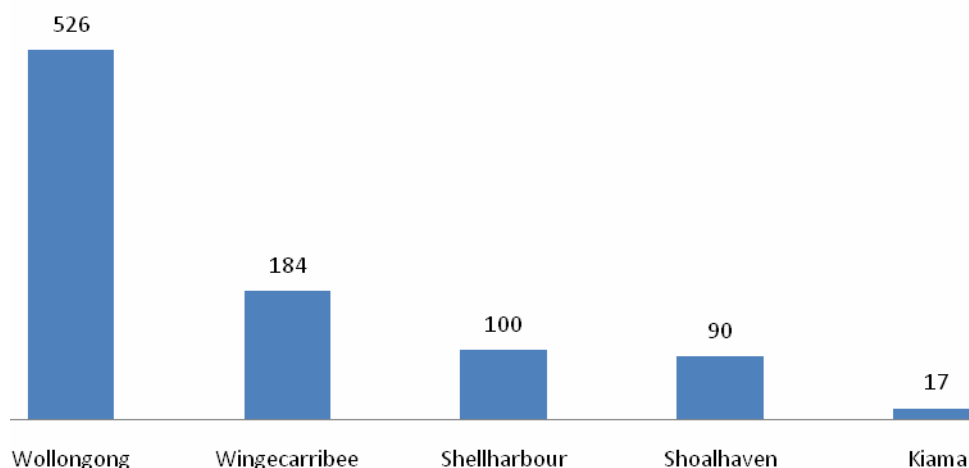
Kiama
Shellharbour
Shoalhaven
Wingecarribee
Wollongong

At the 2006 Census, Illawarra had a population of 394,212 persons. The 2006 Census counted 1338 persons as homeless in Illawarra (excluding marginal residents of caravan parks - see section 3.2 below). The total included 129 Indigenous homeless persons. Illawarra accounted for 5% of the total NSW homeless population in 2006.

The rate of homelessness in Illawarra in 2006 was 34 persons per 10,000 persons compared to 42 per 10,000 persons for NSW as a whole.

The 2006 Census counted 526 homeless households¹ in Wollongong LGA which was 57% of the regional total of homeless households. Around 20% of total homeless households were in Wingecarribee with 11% in Shellharbour.

FIGURE 1: NUMBER OF HOMELESS HOUSEHOLDS BY LGA ILLAWARRA



Source: Housing NSW – estimate of homeless households by LGA based on 2006 Census

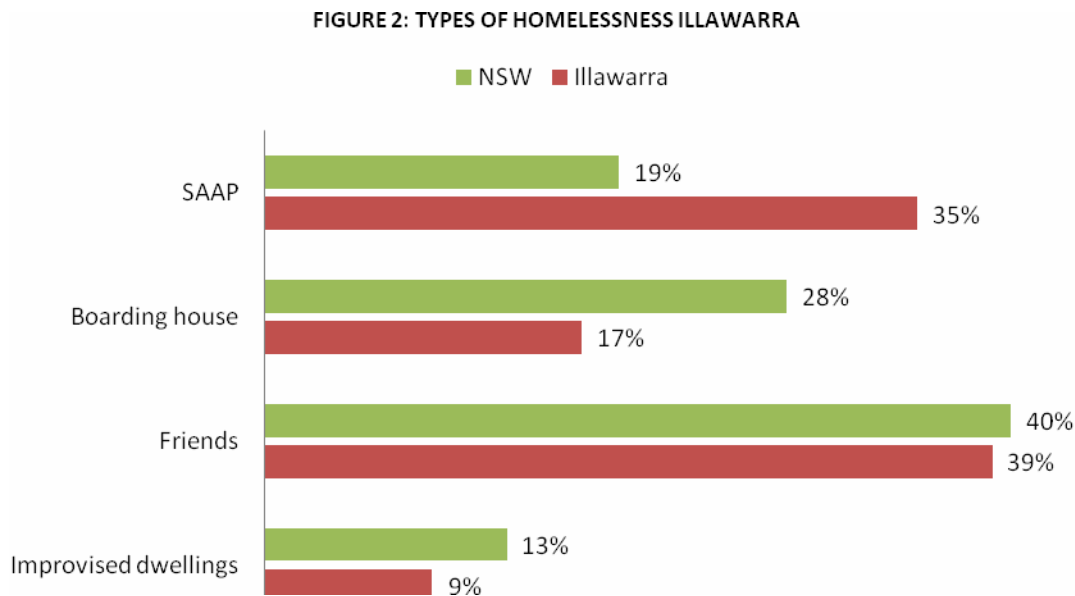
¹ Housing NSW has prepared estimates of the number of homeless households based on ABS Census 2006 data which aggregates data on the basis of the number of homeless persons. The total number of homeless households is less than the total number of homeless persons.

3.2 TYPES OF HOMELESSNESS

The 2006 Census includes the following categories in the definition of homeless:

Improved dwellings	Sheds, tents, humpies, derelict buildings and people sleeping rough in parks, cars and public places
Friends	People staying with friends and relatives on a temporary basis, sometimes referred to as “couch surfers”
Boarding houses	Single room accommodation without a private bathroom or kitchen or security of tenure
SAAP	Services funded under the Supported Accommodation Assistance Program including emergency shelters, hostels and refuges

Figure 2 below shows the distribution of these types of homelessness in Illawarra at the 2006 Census based on the number of homeless persons in each type.



Source: Australian Institute of Health and Welfare Counting the Homeless, 2009 Canberra. Data has been aggregated into the RCP Illawarra region

As shown above, Illawarra has a greater proportion of homeless people staying in SAAP services compared to the state as a whole. Thirty five per cent of homeless persons were in SAAP accommodation compared to the state average of 19%. The proportion of homeless people staying with friends was similar to state averages but the proportion in other types of homelessness was lower in the Illawarra compared to State averages.

There were 472 marginal caravan park renters in Illawarra counted in the 2006 Census which was 9% of the total number of marginal renters in NSW. Marginal caravan park residents are defined by the ABS as people renting caravans as their usual address with non one in the household having full time work.

Marginal caravan park residents are not generally included in the definition of homeless because of difficulties in distinguishing between people who choose to live in caravans and those who are forced to do so by circumstances. If marginal caravan park renters were included in the definition of homeless, they would account for 26%² of homeless people in Illawarra

3.3 INDIGENOUS HOMELESSNESS

AIHW analysis³ indicates that in 2006 6% of Indigenous homeless people were located in Illawarra. In Illawarra the rate of Indigenous homeless is 143 per 10,000 persons compared to 31 per 10,000 persons for non Indigenous.

Indigenous homeless people are much more likely to be in SAAP accommodation - 70% were in SAAP accommodation compared to 30% for non Indigenous homeless.⁴ Illawarra has a higher proportion of Aboriginal SAAP clients – 17% are Aboriginal compared to the State average of 15%.

3.4 CHARACTERISTICS OF SAAP CLIENTS

About 19% of people defined as homeless use SAAP services. The following tables compare data on SAAP clients in Illawarra with NSW as a whole based on the SAAP National Data Collection June to December 2008⁵.

Age of SAAP clients

Figure 3 below compares the ages of SAAP clients in Illawarra with SAAP clients in NSW as a whole.

As shown below, Illawarra has a younger demographic among SAAP clients than NSW as a whole. Almost half (48%) of Illawarra SAAP clients are aged up to 24 years compared to 37% for NSW as a whole.

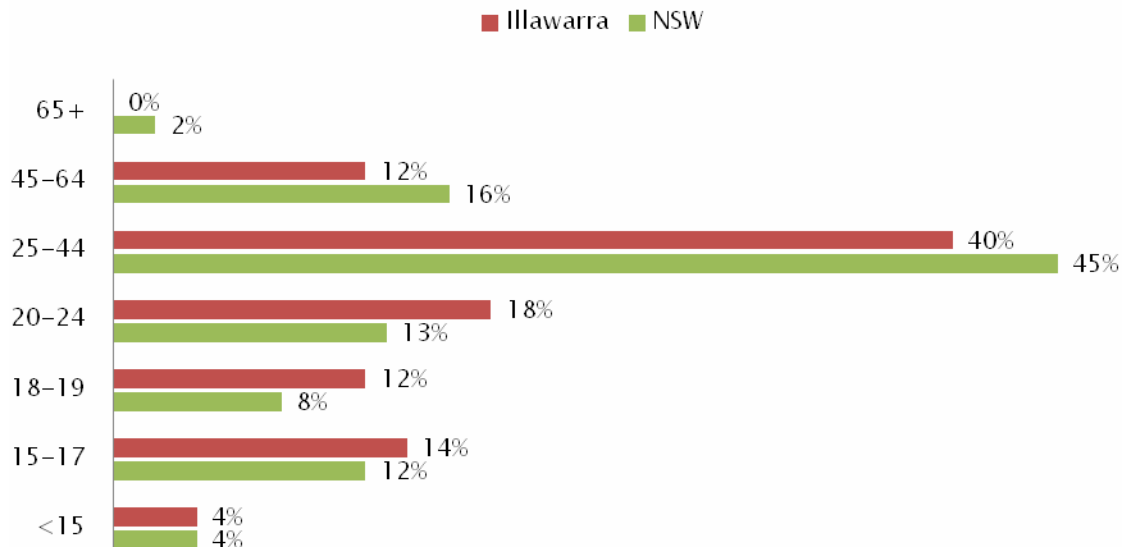
² Australian Institute of Health and Welfare *Counting the Homeless*, 2009 Canberra

³ Australian Institute of Health and Welfare *Counting the Homeless*, 2009 Canberra

⁴ Australian Institute of Health and Welfare *Counting the Homeless*, 2009 Canberra

⁵ SAAP NDCA data is generally aggregated by Community Services NSW regions. For this plan, data was re-aggregated according to Regional Coordination Program (RCP) regions.

FIGURE 3: AGE OF SAAP CLIENTS ILLAWARRA

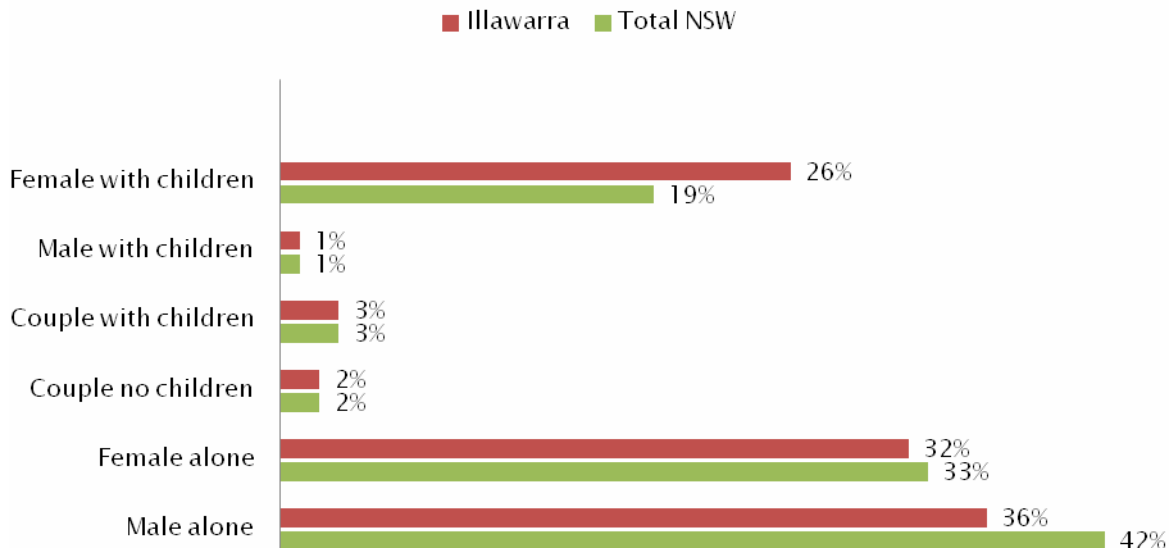


Source: SAAP National Data Collection June to December 2008. Data has been aggregated into the Illawarra RCP region

Household composition of SAAP clients

Figure 4 below compares the household composition of SAAP clients in Illawarra with SAAP clients for NSW as a whole.

FIGURE 4: HOUSEHOLD COMPOSITION OF SAAP CLIENTS ILLAWARRA



Source: SAAP National Data Collection June to December 2008. Data has been aggregated into the Illawarra RCP region

The Illawarra has a much greater proportion of single women with children at 26% compared to the state average of 19%. The rate of males alone is lower in Illawarra at 36% compared to the state average of 42%.

Main reasons for seeking SAAP assistance

Figure 5 below shows the top five reasons for seeking SAAP assistance in Illawarra compared to NSW as a whole.

The primary reason for seeking SAAP assistance in Illawarra is domestic violence at 15% which is the same proportion as for NSW as a whole. Combined with “time out from family” and “relationship breakdown” these family related reasons represent 32% of the main reason for seeking assistance in Illawarra.

Eviction was the main reason for seeking assistance in Illawarra in 8% of cases compared to 4% for NSW as a whole.

FIGURE 5: TOP 5 REASONS FOR SEEKING SAAP ASSISTANCE ILLAWARRA

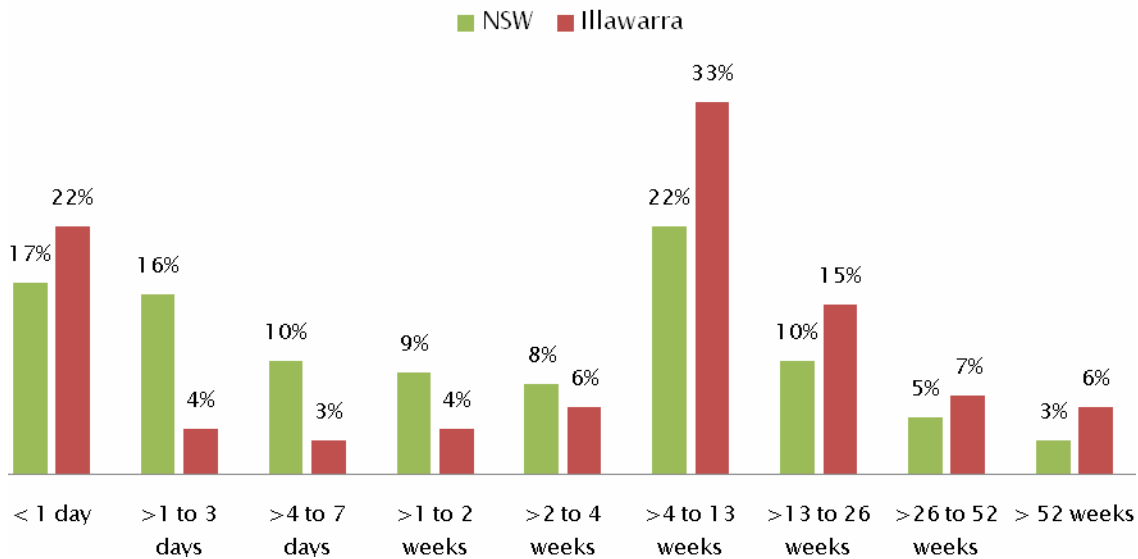


Source: SAAP National Data Collection June to December 2008. Data has been aggregated into the Illawarra RCP region

Length of support period by SAAP services

As shown in Figure 6, people using SAAP services in the Illawarra generally use them for longer periods than state averages. Thirty three per cent of clients use SAAP services for 4-13 weeks compared to 22% for the state as a whole. Fifteen per cent of clients use services for 13-26 weeks compared to the state average of 10%. Twenty two per cent of Illawarra SAAP clients used services for less than one day compared to 17% for the state.

FIGURE 6: LENGTH OF SAAP SUPPORT PERIOD ILLAWARRA

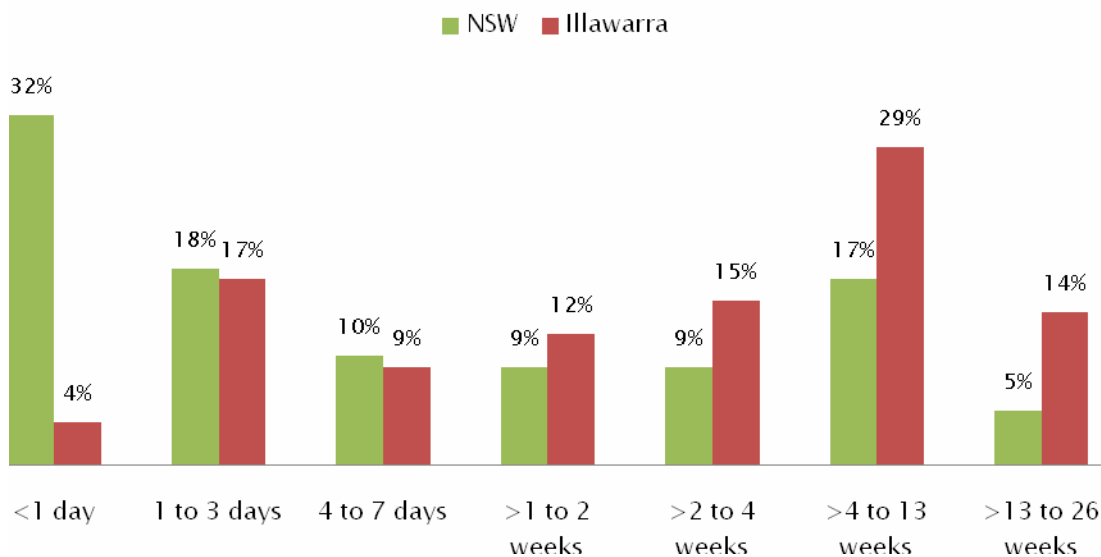


Source: SAAP National Data Collection June to December 2008. Data has been aggregated into the Illawarra RCP region

Length of SAAP accommodation⁶

As shown in Figure 7, people using SAAP accommodation in Illawarra stay for longer periods than the state average. Twenty nine per cent of SAAP clients in Illawarra are accommodated for 4-13 weeks compared to 17% of the State total. Fourteen per cent of SAAP clients in Illawarra are accommodated for 13-26 weeks compared to 5% for the state as a whole. Only 4% stay for less than one day compared to 32% for NSW as a whole.

FIGURE 7: LENGTH OF SAAP ACCOMMODATION ILLAWARRA



Source: SAAP National Data Collection June to December 2008. Data has been aggregated into the Illawarra RCP region

⁶ Based on closed support periods

4 HOMELESSNESS SERVICE SYSTEM STRENGTHS, ISSUES AND GAPS

The Illawarra regional homelessness workshop was attended by over 50 representatives from local agencies and services with a role to play in preventing and responding to homelessness. A list of organisations and agencies who attended the workshop is included at Appendix 1.

The workshop identified key client groups as well as the role of local and state-wide responses to homelessness as outlined below.

4.1 TARGET GROUPS

Target groups identified through the workshop reflect those groups with high levels of demand for support services as well as groups who were harder to reach or where service system gaps prevented effective responses to homelessness.

Target groups identified included:

- women and families at risk of homelessness due to domestic violence.
- clients with psycho-social issues resulting in them having poor relationship, budgeting and life skills, especially those involved in substance use and those who have a history of mental illness.
- young people, who are often ‘couch surfers’
- young parents especially young mothers
- Aboriginal people
- CALD clients especially women who are ostracized from their communities.
- lower income families who have become homeless due to the lack of affordable properties to rent and a similar lack of availability of social housing;
- people who are listed on “bad tenant” databases.

Based on discussion at the workshop and the data analysis, key target groups are:

- Young homeless
- Aboriginal homeless
- Single females with children who are homeless
- Households at risk of eviction
- Homeless people with a history of mental illness

4.2 LOCAL RESPONSES TO HOMELESSNESS

Local responses to homelessness include a range of SAAP funded projects as well as initiatives focused on strengthening service relationships and improved service coordination. These projects and initiatives are outlined below. State wide initiatives that have local benefits in relation to homelessness are also outlined.

Overview of Illawarra SAAP funded projects

There are currently 15 SAAP funded projects in the Illawarra Region⁷. Almost half (46%) of the services in the Illawarra region are targeted towards young people and one fifth (20%) are targeted towards women with/without children escaping domestic violence. Services supporting homeless single women in this region accounted for approximately 13% of total SAAP projects.

The majority of services are located in the Wollongong LGA (53%) and are primarily targeted at young people (63%). The remaining services are distributed across Wollongong and Shoalhaven LGAs. Homeless young people in the Shoalhaven LGA have twice as many services available to them than each of the other target groups.

The distribution of SAAP services according to target group is shown in the Table below.

Target Group	No. of services	%
Women and women with children escaping domestic violence	3	20
Young people	7	46
Single men	1	7
Families including single parent families	1	7
Single women	2	13
Youth Social Justice Strategy	1	7
Total	15	100%

NB: The percentages shown above relate to the number of projects not the distribution of funding to target groups
Source: Community Services NSW, SAAP funded services have been aggregated into the Illawarra RCP region

Other models and approaches

Workshop participants identified a number of existing models and approaches to address homelessness in the Illawarra and Shoalhaven that reflect homelessness reform objectives. These include the following examples:

Cross sector collaboration

There are a number of local responses to homelessness involving cross sector collaboration that have been established and can potentially be built upon. These include:

- the Dual Diagnosis Project with a focus on mental illness (involving a partnership between Southern Youth and Family Services (SYFS), South East Sydney and Illawarra Area Health Service (SESIAHS) and Housing NSW)
- Jim D'Silva Farm (St Vincent De Paul)

⁷ Data on the distribution of SAAP funded services in NSW was supplied by Community Services NSW. This data was aggregated into the RCP regions.

- Legal Aid NSW - specialist outreach services. There are three clinics in the Shoalhaven/Illawarra region operated in collaboration with the Public Interest Advocacy Centre's Homeless Persons Legal Service, Southern Youth and Family Services, St Vincent de Paul and Baptist Community Services. The clinics are run at SYFS premises in Wollongong, BCS Darcy House in Port Kembla and St Vincent de Paul in Nowra.
- Illawarra Foyer Model Youth Project
- Illawarra Legal Centre – provides free legal advice
- Southern Suburbs Integrated Care Management Project
- Paddy's Place – a joint venture between Housing NSW and the Housing Trust to provide strategies to break the cycle of homelessness through the provision of short term, transitional housing and appropriate exit strategies.
- Private Rental Brokerage Service – HNSW Wollongong/Shoalhaven.

Partnerships and networks

Workshop participants identified effective local partnerships that could be further developed to build the capacity of the homelessness service system. Examples include partnerships and shared case management approaches and referral processes between women's refuges, Wollongong Women's Housing and emergency housing services. Some specific examples provided included:

- Centrelink Community Engagement Office, Shoalhaven
- HASI and JGOS networks - Local network of key agencies focused on refining and implementing working arrangements for HASI and JGOS (see s 4.3 below)
- Shoalhaven Paddy's Place model - Local agency plan to develop a similar model to Paddy's Place (Wollongong) in Shoalhaven
- Network of Specialist Homelessness Services (Cross SAAP Sector Network)
- Southern suburbs integrated case management model
- Women's Housing Project and the Men's Project offering case management and accommodation with support
- Illawarra Social Housing Forum
- Co-location of Housing NSW within the Dapto Centrelink Office

4.3 STATE WIDE PROGRAMS AND PARTNERSHIPS

Addressing homelessness requires a range of strategies and approaches. State-wide programs and partnerships have been developed over time to provide responses to particular target groups such as people with mental illness or to provide particular forms of support such as financial assistance. Each of these programs and partnerships support the NSW Homelessness Action Plan.

The workshop and submissions highlighted the following examples of existing programs and partnerships:

Accommodation and support

The NSW Housing and Human Services Accord Agreement

The NSW Housing and Human Services Accord Agreement was developed as a shared policy commitment by NSW Housing and NSW Human Services Agencies to help mutual clients with complex needs to live independently and maintain their tenancies including people with disabilities, people with mental health problems and vulnerable families needing access to secure housing.

The Housing and Accommodation Support Initiative (HASI)

HASI is a partnership program funded by the NSW Government that facilitates access to long-term housing linked to specialist support for people with mental illness. HASI was identified by workshop participants as a model that represented an effective cross-agency response that could potentially be expanded locally.

Housing NSW Temporary Accommodation

The Temporary Accommodation program provides short term accommodation in low cost hotels, motels and caravan parks for people who are experiencing a housing crisis.

Nation Building and Economic Stimulus Program

Approximately 40% of all new accommodation under this program will be targeted to homeless or imminently homeless people.

Tenants Advice and Advocacy Program

NSW Fair Trading funds the state wide Tenants Advice and Advocacy Program including a service based in Wollongong.

Homelessness Prevention

Keep Them Safe

Keep Them Safe is a five-year cross agency Action Plan that aims to re-shape the way family and community services are delivered in NSW to improve the safety, welfare and wellbeing of children and young people. Keep Them Safe includes actions to enhance the universal service system, improve early intervention services, better protect children at risk, support Aboriginal children and families, and strengthen partnerships with non-government organisations (NGOs) in the delivery of community services. Strategies and protocols put in place at the local level as part of Keep Them Safe were seen by workshop participants as successful in strengthening joint planning and collaborative responses.

Staying Home Leaving Violence - Shoalhaven

Tenders have been called for the 'Staying Home Leaving Violence' project funded by Community Services in the Shoalhaven.

Private rental Brokerage Service - Shoalhaven

Funding has been approved for a Private Rental Brokerage Service worker for the South Coast.

Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs (FAHCSIA)

FAHCSIA funds 23 Reconnect services in NSW with an estimated capacity to assist around 1,500 young people each year. FAHCSIA also funds 21 Personal Helper and Mentors Programs (PHAMS) which assist people over 16 with mental health problems to live in the community. People who are homeless or at risk of homelessness are a priority group. FAHCSIA also funds Local Health Project in the Illawarra and Shoalhaven.

Department of Education and Training

School counselors are a key link in identifying young people at risk.

Legal Aid NSW

Legal Aid NSW provides assistance to people at risk of homelessness under its Civil Law Program through 11 metropolitan and 10 regional offices.

Centrelink

Centrelink Prison Liaison Officers work with prisoners on release regarding homelessness issues.

The National Partnership on Homelessness has provided funding to additional homelessness prevention projects in the Illawarra as outlined in section 6.

Financial assistance

Crisis Payments available through Centrelink

Crisis Payments assist people experiencing severe financial hardship because of extreme circumstance such as domestic violence or a natural disaster, release from jail or psychiatric confinement, or new arrivals to Australia on a qualifying humanitarian visa.

Rentstart (Housing NSW)

Rentstart provides financial assistance for people who have found private rental accommodation but need financial assistance to meet bond payments and in some cases, advance rent.

4.4 SERVICE SYSTEM ISSUES AND GAPS

The regional homelessness workshop and submission process identified the following homelessness service system issues and gaps:

Service Coordination

- There is a need for high level procedures and communication protocols to support interagency networks.
- Referrals between agencies need to improve so people at risk of homelessness are better identified. This may require education of front-line staff across all agencies to improve identification of people who may be at risk of homelessness.
- Data sharing and sharing of local knowledge is inconsistent between agencies. Improved data sharing arrangements will support more integrated service responses.
- Shared cross agency 'homelessness prevention' education and development of coordinated service responses is required to improve prevention, early intervention and service responses to homelessness in the Illawarra.
- The ability to work across agencies both Government and non Government may be strengthened through means such as secondments, co-locations and increased case conferencing with adult clients.

Early Intervention and Prevention

- The SAAP V Plan for the Southern Area identified a need to strengthen early intervention and prevention and post-crisis responses to homelessness in the Illawarra region.
- Early intervention and prevention approaches in the Illawarra need to be strengthened, with a focus on: families at risk of homelessness, people with mental health or complex issues; Indigenous people, young people leaving care.

- Early intervention service gaps identified include support to sustain tenancies, such as living skills training, financial management, understanding of legal rights and responsibilities, preparation for renting in the private rental market and services providing support to people with mental illness.

Mental Illness

- The capacity of the homelessness service system to deliver accommodation and support to people with mental illness needs to be strengthened. This was identified as a major regional issue for this client group. It needs to be acknowledged that the region has three distinct geographic areas and local needs and service partnerships may vary.
- A variety of responses and different models are needed to respond to people with mental illness who may be at risk of homelessness. Residential Models are an essential component of models likely to be effective in meeting the needs of people with complex problems.
- Communication and referral pathways between community mental health teams and housing staff need further development. Workplace secondment and joint training were identified as options that would improve service integration and collaboration.
- HASI has achieved good outcomes in the Illawarra and provides a model for further investment.
- Examples of other effective models include Early Intervention Supporting Adolescents and Families Team (through Local Mental Health Funding from FAHCSIA) and the Dual Diagnosis Project.
- It was suggested that the Mental Health Mobile Treatment Team could potentially operate 24 hours, 7 days a week.

Aboriginal homelessness

- It was noted that identifying Aboriginal homeless people was a significant challenge and that under-reporting of Aboriginal homelessness was likely.
- A lack of Aboriginal support workers was identified as a service gap in the community housing sector.
- While there was a need for Aboriginal specific case management and service coordination, provision of services to Aboriginal people by mainstream agencies also needs to be strengthened particularly in the context of the need for anonymity in small communities.
- An Aboriginal specific 'hotline' to facilitate referrals to Aboriginal specific and mainstream services was identified as a potential strategy to better meet the needs of Aboriginal people at risk of homelessness.

Domestic Violence

- Given the rates of domestic violence related homelessness in the Illawarra it may be appropriate to extend the Staying Home Leaving Violence initiative in the region.
- Insufficient exit-housing was identified as a key factor constraining the operation of crisis and transitional housing services.

Youth Homelessness

- Youth homelessness is a significant issue in the Illawarra. Support is required to assist young people access and retain their tenancies.
- Young parents are a particular group of 'hidden homeless' in the Illawarra as they are often staying with friends and family. Services report needing to 'ring around' to identify where young parents are in order to provide support services.

5 PRIORITY AREAS FOR ACTION 2010-2014

The Regional Homelessness Action Plan Workshop identified the following five priorities for the Illawarra RHAP 2010-2014:

- Improve access to long term housing
- Strengthen homelessness prevention and early intervention approaches across the service system
- Increase access to sustainable social housing for Aboriginal people
- Support to sustain tenancies for people with mental illness
- Improve service coordination

These priority areas aim to give effect to homelessness reform directions and targets set out in the NSW Homelessness Action Plan.

5.1 IMPROVE ACCESS TO LONG-TERM HOUSING

In line with homelessness reform directions, providing permanent housing with support, rather than transitional or short-term accommodation was identified as a critical service system change that offered better long-term outcomes for people experiencing homelessness. However for some target groups and some situations, it is important to also deliver transitional or short-term accommodation leading to longer term options as appropriate.

Meeting the demand for long-term housing and support presents a number of challenges including access to appropriate housing stock and development of effective and practical partnerships between housing providers, government and non-government services to deliver the support an individual needs to sustain their tenancy in the long term.

Provision of tenancy support services tailored to individual need and encompassing living skills training, financial counseling and access to education and training is recognised as a key homelessness prevention strategy. Assisting individuals into long term accommodation options and then to manage their tenancies can help to prevent evictions from all tenures.

Access to long-term housing: what the research⁸ says

- Housing affordability is a significant issue for many groups, but particularly for women who are trying to leave violent relationships. Without permanent housing options, women may feel they have to choose between returning to the violent relationship or homelessness
- Permanent supportive housing has greater benefits than transitional accommodation for people who are homeless

⁸ Australian Housing and Urban Research Institute *Evidence to Inform NSW Homelessness Action Plan Priorities 2009-10*, May 2009

5.2 STRENGTHEN HOMELESSNESS PREVENTION AND EARLY INTERVENTION APPROACHES ACROSS THE SERVICE SYSTEM

Developing effective cross-sectoral discharge planning to ensure there are no institutional exits into homelessness and helping people sustain their tenancies through access to appropriate support services (including health services, financial counselling, living skills training and strategies to engage in education and employment) are recognised as key strategies that can help to prevent homelessness.

Preventative approaches are recognised as cost effective, delivering support to greater numbers of people compared to the intensive higher cost interventions required to help people exit entrenched cycles of homelessness.

Intervening early to prevent homelessness: what the research says

- Support to prevent eviction from social housing can prevent homelessness including Aboriginal homelessness
- The potential savings to government of intervening early and preventing homelessness may be as much as double the cost of providing assistance once a person has become homeless
- People who become homeless make more use of emergency services including crisis accommodation, hospitals and the justice system than the mainstream population
- Experiencing homelessness under the age of 18 is a significant risk factor for long-term homelessness
- For people leaving prisons, being homeless and not having suitable accommodation are strongly linked to returning to prison.

5.2 INCREASE ACCESS TO SUSTAINABLE SOCIAL HOUSING FOR ABORIGINAL PEOPLE

AIHW analysis⁹ indicates that in 2006, 6% of the NSW Indigenous homeless people were located in the Illawarra. Indigenous homeless people are much higher users of SAAP accommodation than non-Indigenous - 70% were in SAAP accommodation compared to 30% for non Indigenous homeless. There is also a higher proportion of Indigenous people in SAAP services in the Illawarra than the state average.

Aboriginal homelessness - what the research says

- Greater investment in effective responses is needed as Indigenous people disproportionately experience homelessness.
- Different concepts of homelessness may aid in responding more effectively, including understandings of kinship structures and connection to place.
- Actions to prevent the breakdown of Indigenous social housing tenancies can prevent homelessness.
- Social housing administrative processes can negatively and unnecessarily impact on the success of Indigenous tenancies.

⁹ Australian Institute of Health and Welfare *Counting the Homeless*, 2009 Canberra

- Indigenous housing careers are often shaped by high rates of life-crises including experienced violence and material disadvantage.
- Indigenous over-crowding in social housing may be a significant direct and indirect cause of homelessness.

5.3 SUPPORT PEOPLE WITH MENTAL ILLNESS TO SUSTAIN THEIR TENANCY

Helping people experiencing mental illness access long term accommodation options and to sustain tenancies through access to health supports is recognised as a key strategy that can help to prevent homelessness.

What the research says about supporting people with mental illness sustain their tenancy

- People entrenched in homelessness have high levels of problematic alcohol and other drug use and other serious mental and physical health needs.
- Post-housing support is critical for maintaining stable accommodation, and beginning the processes of social re-integration
- Multi-disciplinary case management teams are effective and cost-effective.
- It can take many attempts to successfully exit homelessness. It is desirable to minimise the number of attempts.

5.4 IMPROVE SERVICE COORDINATION

The Homelessness Service System comprises a wide range of government and non-government services. Improving coordination and collaboration between mainstream agencies, specialist homelessness agencies and specialist services is critical to improving outcomes for people who are homeless or at risk of homelessness.

Benefits of a coordinated homelessness service system - what the research says

Prevention of homelessness and effective responses to homelessness are supported by an integrated and coordinated homelessness service system. According to the AHURI research prevention and early intervention responses to homelessness are most effective when they:

- Involve mainstream agencies,
- Support a good understanding risk factors and danger signs, and
- Involve coordination between government, non-government and emergency agencies in providing housing and support

6 ACTIONS TO ADDRESS PRIORITY AREAS

Actions under this plan focus on the five priority areas:

- Improve access to long term housing
- Strengthen homelessness prevention and early intervention approaches across the service system
- Increase access to sustainable social housing for Aboriginal people
- Support to sustain tenancies for people with mental illness
- Improve service coordination

State-wide action on implementing service system reform will be undertaken in parallel to regional actions. This work will support regional efforts and aid in further developing regional plans.

6.1 IMPROVE ACCESS TO LONG TERM HOUSING

Key actions to improve access to long term housing are the following Illawarra projects funded under the National Partnership on Homelessness:

Support services to assist women escaping domestic violence maintain tenancies

This project aims to address women and children's homelessness caused by domestic violence. The project also aims to improve women and children's safety and reduce the length of time families who have experienced domestic violence spend in SAAP services. The project aims to increase housing options for women and children who have experienced domestic violence by providing integrated support and services to women to improve their ability to access the private rental market and maintain their tenancies. The project will assist 30 families.

Provision of rental subsidy for women escaping domestic and family violence (Start Safely)

The project aims to increase housing options for women and children who have experienced domestic violence by providing rental subsidies so they can access the private rental market. The project will assist over 100 people in Wollongong, Shellharbour, Kiama and Shoalhaven.

Additional Areas for Action

A number of additional strategies aimed at sustaining tenancies were identified:

- Continue to deliver tenancy support and advocacy services to assist people at risk of homelessness and prevent eviction from all tenures
- Provide services to help sustain tenancies in the private rental market
- Continue to strengthen relationships between community housing providers and Aboriginal organisations to improve access to social housing and tenancy support for Aboriginal people
- Investigate opportunities for Housing First approaches in the Illawarra Region

6.2 STRENGTHEN HOMELESSNESS PREVENTION AND EARLY INTERVENTION APPROACHES ACROSS THE SERVICE SYSTEM

A key action to strengthen prevention and early intervention approaches is the project funded under the National Partnership on Homelessness:

Foyer model for young people in the Illawarra

This project aims to provide an early intervention response to young people with low to medium support who are at risk of homelessness. The project will build on the Illawarra Foyer model and will provide on-site accommodation and support services to young people with lower needs. The aim of the project is to achieve long term and sustainable outcomes for young people through providing them with integrated housing and access to support to address the underlying causes of their homelessness. This project will assist 25 young people per annum.

Additional Areas for Action

A number of additional strategies aimed at sustaining tenancies were identified

- Use a brokerage model to deliver multi-disciplinary tenancy support, health outreach and advocacy services to people at risk of homelessness
- Develop cross sector training and development approaches to improve identification of people at risk of, or experiencing homelessness
- Facilitate coordinated discharge planning and access to housing with support for people leaving corrections and institutional care arrangements

6.3 INCREASE ACCESS TO SUSTAINABLE SOCIAL HOUSING FOR ABORIGINAL PEOPLE

A key action to strengthening sustainable housing for Aboriginal people is the Illawarra project funded under the National Partnership on Homelessness:

Assisting Aboriginal young people leaving care

The Aboriginal Young People Leaving Care Support project covers the local government areas of Shoalhaven and Wollongong. The project aims to prevent Aboriginal homelessness by assisting 20 young people in care transition to independent living. The project assists Aboriginal young people aged 16 – 25 who are in statutory or supported care and are at risk of placement breakdown, or are homeless or at risk of homelessness, or who have previously been in a care placement and are now in the care of juvenile justice or adult corrections. Under this project additional case worker positions will be established in an existing Aboriginal specific leaving care service provider to assist Aboriginal young people to move into appropriate and sustainable accommodation arrangements.

Additional Areas for Action

- Work with Aboriginal organisation and services to enable them to improve linkages between housing and support services
- Work with non-Aboriginal organisations and services to increase the provision of culturally appropriate services

- Continue to strengthen relationships between community housing providers and Aboriginal organisations to improve access to social housing and tenancy support for Aboriginal people
- Increase numbers of Aboriginal people employed in mainstream services

6.4 SUPPORT TO SUSTAIN TENANCIES FOR PEOPLE WITH MENTAL ILLNESS

A key action identified to focus on sustaining tenancies for people with mental illness in the Illawarra funded under the National Partnership on Homelessness¹⁰ is:

Support for people at risk of, or who are, homeless, with mental health issues

The need to improve the connections between mental health services and the rest of the homelessness service system was identified as a high priority at the 2010 Illawarra regional planning consultation. This project aims to reduce the number of people exiting mental health facilities and services into homelessness. The project will establish a new system of coordinated exit/discharge planning and linkages to long term supports including accommodation. This project will employ a dedicated Homelessness Mental Health Officer who will work across community mental health services and the hospital network in the region to support people experiencing mental health and homelessness issues and facilitate partnerships across the service system.

Brokerage funds will be utilised to support effective discharge plans and ongoing support for the client group. The project will also focus on ensuring cross-agency collaboration to improve discharge planning policies and accommodation support processes for the target client group. Estimated client numbers: 210 (Includes 200 clients provided with clinical support and 10 brokerage packages)

Additional Areas for Action

- Continue to strengthen relationships between health services (emergency department, mental health and drug and alcohol teams) and specialist homelessness services, community housing providers and the private sector to maximise access to and appropriate use of the range of supports available to tenants.
- Investigate the capacity of health services to deliver mental health assessment and support to homeless people through community outreach services.
- Develop universal client consent forms, to support improved referral practices and integrated service delivery between health services, specialist homelessness and other relevant mainstream services.
- Deliver tenancy and clinical support to assist people with mental illness to help secure and maintain their tenancies
- Develop cross sector training and development approaches to improve identification of and responses to people with mental illness who are homeless or may be at risk of homelessness

¹⁰ National Partnership Agreement on Homelessness NSW Implementation Plan 2009-2013, Years 2 – 4

6.5 Improve service coordination

Areas for Action

- Establish formal linkages and information sharing arrangements between the Regional Homelessness Committee and local homelessness services
- Review and develop cross agency assessment and case management practices. Improve joint-case management practices between specialist and mainstream homelessness services
- Continue to strengthen the homelessness service system through interagency networking, improved referral processes and sharing of relevant data and research
- Use brokerage funding to deliver appropriate, flexible and coordinated services to people experiencing homelessness or at risk of homelessness
- Devise a clear strategy to better utilise existing services through the local Social Housing Forum and other interagencies.
- Develop a strategy for service providers to access long term social housing provided through dwellings provided through the Nation Building Economic Stimulus Plan (NBESP).

7 ILLAWARRA REGIONAL HOMELESSNESS ACTION PLAN SUMMARY ACTIONS

This section summarises agreed actions for priority areas to be implemented over the four year period to 2014. A number of actions are in addition to or build on those identified in the NSW Homelessness Action Plan. It is noted that the agreed actions are an initial response to the issues identified in this Plan. Actions will be further developed and refined over time.

Priority Focus Area (1): Improve access to long term housing

NSW Priorities

- Provide models of accommodation that are suitable for different target groups
- Promote partnerships between all levels of government, business, consumers and the not for profit sector
- Provide women who experience domestic violence with access to appropriate, long term accommodation

Action	Lead Agency	Partners	Milestones		
			6 months	1 year	3 years
<p>1.1 Provision of Support services for women escaping domestic and family violence (National Partnership on Homelessness project) Est. client numbers: 30 families¹¹</p> <p>1.2 Provision of Private rental housing subsidy for women escaping domestic and family violence (National Partnership on Homelessness project): Est. client numbers: 100</p>	Community Services, Housing NSW	Wollongong Women's Refuge	Service operational with Coordination Group and staffing in place delivering agreed client outcomes in terms of contracted numbers	Provision of 10 social housing tenancies and 20 Start Safely subsidies per annum Developed linkages with existing service system	

¹¹ For National Partnership on Homelessness projects, the number of clients refers to the number to be assisted at any one time based on a full 12 months of operation

1.3 Identify opportunities to access Nation Building and Economic Stimulus Plan properties for long term housing for homeless people	The Housing Trust and Housing NSW	Other service providers	Due to urgent turnaround times for allocation, informal processes are already in place. A more formalised process is being formulated with a view to completion by the end of July 2010.		
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Priority Focus Area (2) Strengthen prevention and early intervention					
NSW Priorities <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Transition people who are homeless to appropriate long term accommodation and support</i> • <i>Support young people to maintain connection with education, training and employment</i> 					
Action	Lead Agency	Partners	Milestones		
			6 months	1 year	3 years
2.1 Foyer model for young people in the Illawarra (<i>National Partnership on Homelessness project</i>): Est. client numbers: 25 p.a.	Community Services	Service providers	Identify successful provider Commence implementation	Monitor implementation	Evaluate effectiveness of model
2.2 Paddy's Place - homeless and transitional accommodation model – targeting clients with a history of cyclical homelessness with a view to long term housing options	Housing NSW and The Housing Trust	Housing NSW and the Housing Trust	Ongoing		

Priority Focus Area (3): Support people with mental illness sustain their tenancy					
NSW Priorities					
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Support people with a disability, mental health issues and/or substance abuse to maintain their accommodation • Explore new models of delivering accommodation linked to support 					
Action	Lead Agency	Partners	Milestones		
			6 months	1 year	3 years
3.1 Support for people at risk of, or who are homeless with mental health issues. (National Partnership on Homelessness project): Est. client numbers: 210	SESIAHS	Social housing providers	Develop project specification Conduct service provider selection process	Monitor implementation of project	Conduct project evaluation
3.2 HASI – a partnership program funded by the NSW Government that facilitates access to long-term housing linked to specialist support for people with mental illness	SESIAHS	Social housing providers	Ongoing		
3.3 JGOS – joint guarantee of service – interagency group supporting mutual clients with mental health issues and receiving housing services	SESIAHS and Housing NSW	Community Housing providers	Ongoing		

Priority Focus Area (4): Increase access to sustainable social housing for Aboriginal people					
NSW Priorities					
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide accommodation and support, where relevant, to people leaving statutory care, custody or health facilities • Make services more accessible and responsive to Aboriginal people 					
Action	Lead Agency	Partners	Milestones		
			6 months	1 year	3 years
4.1 Aboriginal Young People Leaving Care Support (<i>National Partnership on Homelessness</i> project): Est. client numbers: 20 p.a.	NSW Community Services	Aboriginal Affairs, Housing NSW, NSW Health, Juvenile Justice, Corrective Services, Ageing, Disability and Home Care	Service operational with Steering Committee and staffing in place meeting client outcomes in terms of agreed contracted numbers	Assistance provided to 20 young Aboriginal people per annum. Developed linkages with existing service system.	
4.2 Nation Building and Economic Stimulus Plan targeting of accommodation to Aboriginal and homeless Aboriginal people	The Housing Trust and Housing NSW	Community Housing providers	Due to urgent turnaround times for allocation, informal processes are already in place. A more formalised process is being formulated with a view to completion by the end of July 2010.		

Priority Focus Area (5): Service System Coordination					
NSW Priorities:					
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Deliver integrated service responses</i> • <i>Improve identification and responses to homelessness by mainstream and specialist support services</i> 					
Action	Lead Agency	Partners	Milestones		
			6 months	1 year	3 years
5.1 Devise a clear strategy to better utilise existing services through local Social Housing Forum and other interagencies.	Department of Human Services	Government and non government service providers	Develop project scope and potential application		

8 REPORTING AND ACCOUNTABILITY

The NSW Homelessness Action Plan includes a commitment to establish a governance mechanism to oversee the implementation of the Plan that promotes partnerships between all levels of government, the non-government sector, consumer groups and the broader community, including the business sector.

Since that time, a governance framework has been established to oversee the implementation of the NSW Homelessness Action Plan. This framework recognises that effective governance for whole of Government and whole of community planning and delivery of the projects and initiatives under the NSW Homelessness Action Plan requires accountability, consultation and relationships, and that the strength of the overall governance structure relies on the effectiveness of each of these mechanisms.

The governance framework under the NSW Homelessness Action Plan comprises:

- Regional Homelessness Committees
- Regional Manager Clusters
- Homelessness Interagency Committee
- Justice & Human Services Chief Executive Officers Committee
- NSW Premier's Council on Homelessness.

Regional Homelessness Committees, chaired by Housing NSW, are required to report on the implementation of the Regional Homelessness Action Plans to Regional Manager Clusters and the NSW Homelessness Interagency Committee. Progress against the Regional Homelessness Action Plans is reported on an annual basis through the NSW State Plan.

Regional Homelessness Committees are also responsible for ensuring that relevant stakeholders within the region are aware of and have an opportunity to provide input into the ongoing development and implementation of the Regional Homelessness Action Plans.

APPENDIX 1: WORKSHOP ATTENDEES

Illawarra Regional Homelessness Action Plan Workshop 11th February 2010 Kiama

Organisations attending, or invited to attend the regional homelessness action plan workshop:

ORGANISATION
Ageing, Disability and Home Care NSW
Argyle Housing
Baptist Community Services
Care South
Centrelink
Community Services NSW
Corrective Services NSW
Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs
Department of Premier & Cabinet NSW
Disability Trust
Family Services Illawarra
Homelessness NSW
Housing NSW
Housing NSW - Homelessness Unit
Illawarra Aboriginal Medical Service
Illawarra Housing Trust
Illawarra Multicultural Services
Illawarra Youth Housing
Juvenile Justice NSW
Lighthouse Church
Mental Health Coordinating Council
Murra Mia Tenant Advice Service
Neami
Nowra Aboriginal Medical Service
NSW Aboriginal Affairs
NSW Aboriginal Housing Office
NSW Division of General Practice – Illawarra and Shoalhaven
NSW Legal Aid Commission
NSW Police
Regional Tenant Resource Service
Rosa Women's Refuge - Shoalhaven Women's Resource Group Ltd.
Shoalhaven Youth Accommodation
South Eastern Sydney and Illawarra Area Health Service

Southern Council Groups
Southern Cross Community Housing
Southern Highlands Youth Refuge
Southern Youth & Family Services
St Vincent De Paul - Coniston Men's Shelter and John Purcell House
Sydney Indigenous Coordination Centre
Tharawal Local Aboriginal Land Council
Vincentian House, Family & Women's Services
Waminda Aboriginal Medical Service
Warilla Women's Refuge
Wollongong Emergency Family Housing
Wollongong Women's Housing
Wollongong Women's Refuge

Department of Human Services
Housing NSW

July 2010