Introduction
A White Paper outlines a government’s policy in a particular area. Prior to issuing a White Paper, governments release a Green Paper that provides their perspective on the issue and possible policy ideas. The Government then invites feedback on the Green Paper and this feedback informs the development of the White Paper.

The Australian Government issued a Green paper “Which Way Home?: A New Approach to Homelessness” in May 2008 and invited interested parties to submit a response and attend consultative forums across the country. Sacred Heart Mission provided a response to the Green Paper, attended consultation sessions and the SHM CEO had various meetings with Federal Housing Minister and advisors to the Prime Minister to discuss our view on what should be included in the White paper.


Goals of the White Paper
The Australian Government, with the agreement of state and territory governments, has set two headline goals to guide the long term response to homelessness:
- halve overall homelessness by 2020
- offer accommodation to all rough sleepers who need it by 2020

Additional funding allocated in the white paper
The Australian Government has approved an additional $1.2 billion over the next four years as a “down payment” on the 12 year reform agenda outlined in this White Paper.

Extra Funding for Support Services: $800 million over 4 years
This funding will be spent on services to prevent and reduce homelessness. It is expected that Victoria will receive an additional $200 million over the four years which equates to $50 million annually.

This will increase Victorian expenditure on homelessness from approximately $130 million per annum to $180 million per annum (a 40% increase).
Extra Funding for Social Housing
$400 million will increase the supply of affordable and supported housing for people who would otherwise be homeless.

It is not clear how this funding will be allocated amongst the States.

Strategies outlined in the White Paper
The White Paper identifies that the response to homelessness will be implemented through three strategies:

1. **Turning off the tap: services will intervene early to prevent homelessness**
   This strategy involves many different areas of government and will involve a range of reforms that are already under way such as the Closing the Gap Package for Indigenous Australians, the National Mental Health and Disability Employment Strategy and the proposed National Child Protection Framework.

   The White Paper recognizes that prevention strategies should focus on key transition points and life events.

   Initiatives under this strategy include:
   - Increasing support for people in public and private rental housing to maintain their tenancies
   - Assisting up to 9,000 additional young people between 12 and 18 years of age, to remain connected with their families
   - Assisting up to 2,250 additional families at risk of homelessness to stay housed
   - No exits into homelessness from statutory, custodial care, health, mental health and drug and alcohol services
   - Helping women and children who experience domestic violence to stay safely in the family home
   - Delivering community based mental health services under the Personal Helpers and Mentors Program (PHAMs) to 1,000 difficult to reach Australians, including people who are homeless
   - Establishing a network of 90 Community Engagement Officers to improve access to Centrelink services for people at risk of homelessness

2. **Improving and Expanding Services**
   This strategy focuses on ensuring that mainstream services and specialist services work together to coordinate the response provided to a person who is homeless. It also requires mainstream services to identify people who are homeless or at risk of homelessness so they receive the necessary support and to review policies and practices to ensure they do not make the lives of their homeless clients even more difficult.
The paper recognizes that specialist homelessness services are needed to provide a crisis response to people who have no accommodation, to assist them with their transition to stable housing and to provide a source of expertise on homelessness. But specialist homelessness services cannot be expected to deliver the entire homelessness response.

Initiatives under this strategy include:
- A workforce development strategy for specialist homelessness services. This will include developing Advanced Practitioner positions in specialist homelessness services that will drive this service coordination and provide enhanced career opportunities for skilled staff
- Testing new funding models that reflect the complexity of client’s needs
- Improving information technology systems for services
- Developing quality standards for specialist homelessness services

3. Breaking the cycle
The paper recognizes that for some people, homelessness is an isolated event and for others (“a small minority”), homelessness is part of a chaotic and uncertain life of poverty and disadvantage. These people tend to cycle in and out of homelessness and when they do find housing, it tends to be short term.

Initiatives under this strategy include:
- Building up to 2,700 additional public and community housing dwellings for low income households
- Allocating aged care places and capital funds for at least one new specialist facility per year over the next four years for people who are homeless
- Building up to 4,200 new houses and upgrading up to 4,800 existing houses in remote Indigenous communities
- Providing assertive outreach programs for rough sleepers
- Improving services for older people experiencing homelessness

Research
The Australian Government will develop a national homelessness research strategy to support the White Paper. Homelessness research priorities will include population-based research, cost-benefit analysis of the effectiveness of interventions and longitudinal studies.
Implementation

- The Australian Government will not be directly funding homelessness services. State Governments will receive the funds and directly fund agencies.
- Each State must provide the Australian government with an implementation plan by 1 April 2009, outlining the specific ways in which the additional funds will be used and how these measures will achieve the goals of the White Paper. This plan must be approved by the Australian government.
- It is unlikely that State Governments will produce a detailed implementation plan by April. It is expected that they will produce a high level plan that indicates the broad areas they intend to fund. The more detailed policy work will then be undertaken in the last 6 months of 2009.

Impact of White Paper on Sacred Heart Mission

The White Paper is a significant development in homelessness policy in Australia. For the first time in its history the Australian Government has set a target to reduce homelessness and invested additional funds to achieve it.

As noted above, the White Paper sets a broad policy framework rather than providing any specific detail on what particular initiatives will be funded. It is likely that the Victorian Government will not be clear on the way they intend to use the funds until late 2009.

As a result, the impact on SHM will remain unclear for some time to come. It is critical however, that we work with the Victorian Government to ensure that the implantation plan and more detailed policy work includes initiatives that will provide benefit to the people that use the Mission's services.