

The Auditor-General
Audit Report No.31 2012–13
Performance Audit

Implementation of the National Partnership Agreement on Homelessness

**Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and
Indigenous Affairs**

Australian National Audit Office

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ISSN 1036-7632

ISBN 0 642 81325 6 (Print)

ISBN 0 642 81326 4 (On-line)

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Canberra ACT
2 May 2013

Dear Mr President
Dear Madam Speaker

The Australian National Audit Office has undertaken an independent performance audit in the Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs in accordance with the authority contained in the *Auditor-General Act 1997*. Pursuant to Senate Standing Order 166 relating to the presentation of documents when the Senate is not sitting, I present the report of this audit to the Parliament. The report is titled *Implementation of the National Partnership Agreement on Homelessness*.

Following its presentation and receipt, the report will be placed on the Australian National Audit Office's Homepage—<http://www.anao.gov.au>.

Yours sincerely

Ian McPhee
Auditor-General

The Honourable the President of the Senate
The Honourable the Speaker of the House of Representatives
Parliament House
Canberra ACT

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Abbreviations

ABS	Australian Bureau of Statistics
ANAO	Australian National Audit Office
COAG	Council of Australian Governments
FaHCSIA	Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs
NAHA	National Affordable Housing Agreement
NPAH	National Partnership Agreement on Homelessness
Treasury	The Australian Government Treasury
White Paper	<i>The Road Home—A National Approach to Reducing Homelessness</i>

Glossary

Annual prevalence	The number of people accessing homelessness services over the course of a given year.
A Place to Call Home	A joint initiative of the Australian and state and territory governments to build 600 new homes for individuals and families experiencing homelessness. The initiative commenced in July 2008 but was subsequently rolled into the NPAH.
Homelessness service delivery system	The range of services provided by government agencies to address aspects of homelessness and to support homeless people. These services are often delivered by third party service providers under funding arrangements with government. Such services can include crisis accommodation, domestic violence prevention, mental health, and family and financial counselling.
Minister	The Australian Government Minister responsible for Homelessness. Since 2007 this role has been referred to variously as the Minister for Housing, the Minister for Social Housing and Homelessness, and the Minister for Housing and Homelessness.
Sleeping rough	Homeless people who have no conventional accommodation and consequently live on the streets, in deserted buildings and parks, or other public spaces.
Standing Council on Federal Financial Relations	The Standing Council on Federal Financial Relations is a Council of Australian Governments body which oversees the operation of the Intergovernmental Agreement on Federal Financial Relations. The Council is chaired by the Treasurer and includes the Treasurers of each State and Territory or their designated representative.

Support period	A support period relates to an occasion where a person has made contact with a homelessness service and received assistance. An individual may receive assistance on multiple occasions in any one year and/or may access the services of several homelessness service providers.
<i>The Road Home—A National Approach to Reducing Homelessness</i>	The Australian Government's White Paper on Homelessness released in 2008, which established a national approach to homelessness to facilitate improvement of existing programs and services in addressing and preventing homelessness.

Summary and Recommendations

Summary

Introduction

1. In Australia it is currently estimated that around 105 000 people are homeless on any given night. Of these people, around 6800 will be sleeping rough on the streets, in parks or other public spaces. The remainder will have varying living arrangements, including living in supported accommodation, with family and friends, in extremely overcrowded accommodation, or in boarding houses.¹ To address issues of homelessness, the Australian Government released a White Paper in 2008: *The Road Home—A National Approach to Reducing Homelessness* (White Paper). This outlined the Australian Government's commitment to halve homelessness by 2020 and to offer accommodation to all homeless people sleeping rough who need it by 2020.²

2. The complex nature of homelessness was discussed in the White Paper which noted that 'homelessness is not just the result of too few houses—its causes are many and varied' including domestic violence, a shortage of affordable housing, unemployment, mental illness, family breakdown, and drug and alcohol abuse.³ The White Paper was developed as a national approach to facilitating the improvement of existing programs and services in addressing and preventing homelessness.

National Partnership Agreement on Homelessness

3. To facilitate a national approach to homelessness, the Council of Australian Governments (COAG) agreed in November 2008 to allocate funding of \$800 million over four years, 2009–10 to 2012–13, to the National Partnership Agreement on Homelessness (NPAH). Of the \$800 million, the Australian Government's contribution was \$400 million. An existing initiative, *A Place to Call Home*, was also incorporated into the NPAH, increasing the

¹ Based on the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) estimates of homelessness in Australia—2049.0—*Census of Population and Housing: Estimating homelessness*, 2011, p. 2, released 12 November 2012.

² Australian Government, *The Road Home—A National Approach to Reducing Homelessness*, Canberra, 2008, p. viii.

The definition of homelessness used by the Australian Government prior to the development of a statistical definition of homelessness in 2012, categorises sleeping rough as those people who have no conventional accommodation and consequently live on the streets, in deserted buildings, parks or other public spaces.

³ Ibid., p. iii.

funding available through the agreement to \$1.1 billion and bringing the Australian Government's specific contribution to \$550 million.⁴

4. In entering into the NPAH, COAG emphasised that reducing homelessness '...will require all governments to pursue improvements to a wide range of policies, programs and services.'⁵ Key reforms identified in both the White Paper and the NPAH are directed to increasing the focus on preventing homelessness, improving and expanding services and preventing the recurrence of homelessness. Overall, COAG identified that a better connected service delivery system was necessary for achieving long term sustainable reductions in the number of people who are homeless.⁶ Recognising the long term challenge of addressing homelessness, the Australian Government noted that the additional funding for homelessness being provided through the NPAH 'is a down payment on the 12 year reform agenda'.⁷

5. The NPAH commenced in January 2009 with the primary aim of reducing, preventing and breaking the cycle of homelessness, and increasing the social inclusion of people experiencing homelessness. The four key outcomes set out in the NPAH are that:

- fewer people will become homeless and fewer of these will sleep rough;
- fewer people will become homeless more than once;
- people at risk of experiencing homelessness will maintain or improve connections with their families and communities, and maintain or improve their education, training or employment participation; and
- people at risk of experiencing homelessness will be supported by quality services, with improved access to sustainable housing.⁸

⁴ COAG also entered into the National Partnership Agreement on Social Housing. This was a two year agreement aimed at increasing the supply of social housing, providing approximately 1600 to 2100 additional dwellings by 2009-10, and providing opportunities to grow the not-for-profit housing sector.

⁵ Council of Australian Governments, *National Partnership Agreement on Homelessness*, Canberra, 2009, p. 3.

⁶ The service delivery system includes the wide range of services provided by government agencies to address aspects of homelessness and to support homeless people. These services are often delivered by third party service providers under funding arrangements with government. Such services can include crisis accommodation, domestic violence prevention, mental health, and family and financial counselling.

⁷ Australian Government, *The Road Home—A National Approach to Reducing Homelessness*, Canberra, 2008, p. iii.

⁸ Council of Australian Governments, *National Partnership Agreement on Homelessness*, Canberra, 2009, p. 5.

6. The NPAH seeks to reduce the number of homeless people overall by 7 per cent, Indigenous homelessness by 33 per cent and the number of homeless people sleeping rough by 25 per cent, each by 2013. These performance targets were based on data drawn from the study, *Counting the Homeless 2006*,⁹ that estimated that 104 676 people were homeless in Australia, of whom 9525 were Indigenous. Of the homeless population it was also estimated that 16 375 people were sleeping rough. Accordingly, a 7 per cent reduction in the number of homeless people in Australia would result in a homeless population of 97 350 people by 2013. Based on this data, to reach the targets set for Indigenous homelessness would require a reduction in their numbers to fewer than 6300 people. Similarly, to reach the target for homeless people sleeping rough would require a reduction in their numbers to fewer than 12 300 people.

7. The role of the Australian Government in the NPAH is principally to provide funding to the state and territory governments for homelessness measures. The Australian Government, through the Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs (FaHCSIA), also supports the state and territory governments in delivering the funded measures, and monitors and reports on progress.¹⁰ The state and territory governments, in addition to having the main responsibility for service delivery, are required to make matching funding contributions, and to meet the financial and performance reporting requirements of the NPAH.

8. Australian Government funding was allocated to the state and territory governments based on an estimate of their respective share of the homeless population in 2006. Table S1 shows the estimated homeless population in each state and territory, the current level of Australian Government funding and the level of funding being contributed by the state and territory governments. The NPAH was initially due to expire on 30 June 2013, but the Australian and state and territory governments agreed in March 2013 to enter into a one-year transitional partnership agreement for 2013–14, while negotiations continue on a new longer-term agreement.

⁹ *Counting the Homeless 2006* was a cooperative effort between two universities and several Australia Government agencies and was the definitive source of homelessness data in Australia at the time the NPAH was agreed. The ABS has since released estimates of homeless based on the 2006 and 2011 Censuses of Population and Housing.

¹⁰ The Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs is the lead Australian Government agency responsible for homelessness policy and overall implementation of the NPAH.

Table S1**Funding arrangements under the NPAH**

Jurisdiction	Homeless population 2006 ¹	Australian Government funding (\$ millions)	State/Territory co-contributions (\$ millions)
Australian Capital Territory	1364	10.1	10.1
New South Wales	27 374	140.4	251.9
Northern Territory	4785	25.6	29.4
Queensland	26 782	135.1	148.9
South Australia	7962	40.6	41.4
Tasmania	2507	14.3	18.6
Victoria	20 511	105.7	104.0
Western Australia	13 391	66.8	68.4
Commonwealth Own Purpose Expenditure (research agenda)	–	11.4	–
Total	104 676	550.0	672.7
Total combined funding²		1 222.7	

Source: Australian National Audit Office analysis of COAG data and *Counting the Homeless 2006*.

Note 1: Based on estimates from *Counting the Homeless 2006*, which was the definitive source of homelessness data in Australia at that time. The Australian Bureau of Statistics has since estimated that on census night 2006, 89 728 people were homeless, rather than the 104 676 estimated in *Counting the Homeless 2006*.

Note 2: Total funding available exceeds the \$1.1 billion stated in the NPAH as several of the state and territory governments are providing additional funding for a range of homelessness initiatives above those agreed in the NPAH.

Audit objective, scope and methodology

9. The objective of this audit was to examine the effectiveness of the Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs' administration of the NPAH, including monitoring and reporting of progress against the objective and outcomes of the agreement.

10. Three high level criteria were used to conclude against the audit objective. These were whether:

- FaHCSIA's administrative arrangements supported the effective implementation of the NPAH across all jurisdictions;

- program implementation arrangements are supporting the effective delivery of homelessness services, specifically initiatives directly funded by the Australian Government; and
- progress against the NPAH targets and state and territory implementation plans is being regularly monitored and assessed, and is meeting expectations in relation to improving homelessness.

Audit methodology

11. The Australian Council of Auditors-General agreed in 2010 to increase collaboration, where appropriate, in the conduct of performance audits on topics that have a national dimension. The NPAH was chosen as the topic for the first concurrent audit, and six state and territory Auditors-General have completed or are undertaking similar audits.¹¹

12. A common audit objective and criteria were developed to support the concurrent audit approach. The objective of the state and territory jurisdiction audits was to examine whether or not the relevant government agencies were meeting their obligations under the NPAH, and whether or not the NPAH was making a difference for homeless people. The Australian National Audit Office (ANAO), in preparing this report, has considered the findings of the reports completed by the state and territory Auditors-General.¹²

Overall conclusion

13. In agreeing the NPAH in 2008 the Australian, state and territory governments made a substantial financial commitment to preventing, reducing and breaking the cycle of homelessness. The governments have committed over \$1.1 billion to new and expanded initiatives, but progress is not leading to the achievement of the expected 7 per cent reduction in homelessness by 1 July 2013. Between 2006 and 2011 the number of homeless people, rather than declining, increased by 17 per cent from 89 728 to 105 237 people.¹³ While the NPAH target was to be reached by 1 July 2013, on the basis of this trend,

¹¹ Audits of the NPAH have been or are being undertaken in the Australian Capital Territory, the Northern Territory, Queensland, Victoria, Tasmania and Western Australia. Reports of the audits have been or will be tabled in the relevant state and territory Parliaments.

¹² As of 16 April 2013, the Auditors-General of Western Australia, Victoria, Queensland, Tasmania and the Northern Territory had tabled their reports.

¹³ Based on the ABS estimates of homelessness in Australia—2049.0—*Census of Population and Housing: Estimating homelessness, 2011*, p. 2, released 12 November 2012.

reaching the target will be extremely challenging and is unlikely to be achieved.¹⁴

14. Through the implementation of the NPAH, over 180 new or expanded homelessness initiatives have been funded to provide a range of different services. Demand for services is high and during 2011–12, 229 247 people, or the equivalent of around 1 in 100 Australians, made contact with specialist homelessness services.¹⁵ Specialist homelessness services also provided over 7 million nights of accommodation during 2011–12.¹⁶ However, there is limited information prepared by FaHCSIA, as the department with Australian Government policy responsibility, to assess the extent to which the approach of funding a large set of separate initiatives supports the achievement of the NPAH outcomes and service delivery reforms envisaged by COAG. The available reports of the state and territory Auditors-General have noted that there was evidence of better consultation and engagement across the homelessness sector, but that it was not clear how changes in the service delivery system were assisting the state and territory governments in reducing homelessness by the levels agreed in the NPAH. It was also noted in the reports that without a strong focus on evaluating the effectiveness of individual initiatives, it was not clear whether some of the funded initiatives had been more effective than others in reducing and breaking the cycle of homelessness.

15. At an administrative level, FaHCSIA has generally fulfilled its responsibilities under the NPAH in line with the expectations established through the Intergovernmental Agreement on Federal Financial Relations. The department's management arrangements also provided a sound basis to support the initial implementation phase of the NPAH across jurisdictions. This included engaging with and supporting the responsible Australian Government Minister¹⁷ and working within the roles and responsibilities established by the NPAH to negotiate the state and territory implementation plans.

¹⁴ In considering this trend it is important to note that the NPAH commenced more than halfway through the census cycle and that more time may be required for the funded initiatives to begin to reduce the numbers of homeless people.

¹⁵ For further information see Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, *Specialist Homelessness Services 2011-12, 2012*, Canberra, p. 7.

¹⁶ *ibid.* p. 7.

¹⁷ Since 2007, the Ministerial role of housing and homelessness has been referred to variously as the Minister for Housing, the Minister for Social Housing and Homelessness, and the Minister for Housing and Homelessness. Any subsequent references to the Minister for Housing and Homelessness (the Minister) refer collectively to these roles.

16. FaHCSIA assessed the state and territory implementation plans and negotiated with the state and territory governments over the initiatives funded. However, this process could have been better supported by the department focusing on whether the proposed initiatives, mix of services, and reforms of the homelessness service delivery system would most effectively contribute to the achievement of the outcomes of the NPAH. The implementation plans give attention to the implementation of funded initiatives, but generally lack a clear focus on the achievement and measurement of outcomes, sustainability of outcomes and the quality of homelessness services.

17. In respect of monitoring and reporting on progress, FaHCSIA has largely fulfilled its ongoing role, although there are some significant limitations deriving from the administrative arrangements of the NPAH, which constrain the value of this reporting in informing the department about the effectiveness of measures being implemented to reduce homelessness. To monitor progress in the implementation of the NPAH and the funded initiatives, FaHCSIA put in place a structured performance framework under which each state and territory government was required to provide information on performance as agreed in their implementation plans. Annual reporting requirements have focused on measuring activity at an individual initiative level, rather than progress towards the outcomes of preventing, reducing and breaking the cycle of homelessness. The absence of outcomes-based reporting limits FaHCSIA's ability to make meaningful assessments of overall progress within each jurisdiction, or on a national basis. In addition, FaHCSIA receives only limited information on the extent to which the reforms sought through the NPAH are proving effective. Further, the state and territory governments are not required to report financial information to FaHCSIA, limiting the department's ability to obtain assurance that the jurisdictions are meeting their financial commitments under the NPAH.

18. The NPAH was one of the early national partnerships to be agreed, and its implementation has highlighted a number of policy and implementation issues for further consideration by the Australian Government. In support of the negotiation of future funding arrangements for homelessness, there would be benefit in FaHCSIA providing advice to the Australian Government which addresses the availability of timely data sources to support assessment of the agreement's outcomes; the design of the performance framework, including measures relating to reform of the homelessness service delivery system; and

the strengthening of financial management and reporting requirements, as explained hereunder.

- Measuring the overall impact of the NPAH relies upon census data prepared by the ABS. Although the NPAH benchmark targets were to be met by 2013, the next census will not take place until 2016 and, as a consequence, the key headline measures relating to the number of Australians who are homeless cannot be effectively measured over the life of the current agreement. When census data is to be used to set performance baselines and benchmark targets, the design of the underlying funding arrangement, should, to the extent feasible, be either aligned to the census cycle, or reliable proxy measures.
- The NPAH was aiming to build 'more connected, integrated and responsive services which achieve sustainable housing and economic and social participation of those at risk of homelessness'.¹⁸ Where significant reforms to service delivery arrangements are being sought, the performance measurement and reporting framework should be designed to measure the implementation of the reforms as well as the delivery of funded activities and their impact.
- Payments made through the NPAH are not currently linked to the achievement of agreed milestones, as is the case in some other agreements. Creating a payment structure that is more closely related to performance would enhance public accountability in respect of progress being made towards the outcomes sought by governments, and would be worthy of further consideration in any future agreement.
- The NPAH is based on a shared funding model, but the state and territory governments are not required to report financial information to FaHCSIA. Where a co-contribution approach forms part of any future funding arrangement for homelessness, it is not unreasonable to expect financial information to be reported to FaHCSIA by the state and territory governments, to enable the department to provide assurance to the Minister over the level of contributions made.

19. Consideration should also be given to the issues raised in the available audit reports from the state and territory Auditors-General on the implementation of the NPAH.

¹⁸ Council of Australian Governments, *National Partnership Agreement on Homelessness*, Canberra, 2009, p. 6.

20. The issues raised above in paragraph 18 are matters which may require broader consideration by the Australian Government in respect of other future funding arrangements that operate at a national level. In this context, there is scope to place more emphasis on performance reporting arrangements which assist in identifying those measures or initiatives employed by the state and territory governments that make a significant difference to the achievement of better outcomes, consistent with the objectives agreed by governments.

21. The ANAO has made one recommendation aimed at strengthening the administrative arrangements for potential future funding arrangements involving the delivery of services by the state and territory governments.

Key findings by chapter

Implementation

22. FaHCSIA is the lead Australian Government agency responsible for overall implementation of the NPAH in collaboration with the state and territory governments. At the commencement of the NPAH, FaHCSIA gave consideration to key aspects of program implementation and administration. It developed processes for the negotiation and approval of the state and territory implementation plans in line with the requirements and expectations of the NPAH. This included FaHCSIA providing feedback to the respective state or territory departments for their consideration. However, to effectively influence reform of the homelessness sector and achievement of the NPAH outcomes, FaHCSIA could have given greater attention to assessing how the more than 180 proposed initiatives would collectively contribute to preventing, reducing and breaking the cycle of homelessness in order to achieve the 7 per cent reduction in homelessness envisaged by COAG. The implementation plans give attention to the implementation of funded initiatives, but generally lacked a clear focus on the achievement, measurement and sustainability of outcomes, and the quality of homelessness services.

23. NPAH payments are made by the Australian Government to the state and territory governments on a monthly basis in accordance with the agreed payment schedule. These payments are not linked to the achievement of specific milestone or performance benchmarks. However, an annual review of overall progress by the state and territories is undertaken by FaHCSIA to enable the Minister to make a determination to continue the monthly payments in accordance with the requirements of the Intergovernmental Agreement on Federal Financial Relations and related federal finances

circulars. Due to the timing of the annual reporting process, there is a limited relationship between actual progress and the determination by the Minister, as payments have already been made for the period to which the annual reports on progress relate, and in most years five months of payments will generally be made before the review and determination process is completed. This is in line with the agreement reached by COAG for the NPAH, however, it does not support early feedback on program progress.

Performance monitoring and reporting

24. The NPAH includes a performance framework comprising an objective, outcomes, performance indicators, baselines and benchmark targets. This framework has been replicated in the state and territory implementation plans. However, there is limited alignment between the NPAH outcomes and performance indicators, and the state and territory governments' reports focus on the delivery of individual initiatives rather than overall progress. This inhibits FaHCSIA's ability to effectively assess and report nationally on the outcomes of the NPAH. A better alignment is critical to ascertain whether the reforms being sought by the Australian Government and the underlying approaches to preventing, reducing and breaking the cycle of homelessness are effective strategies.

25. The NPAH's performance reporting framework has been examined in several Australian Government or cross-jurisdictional reviews. The reviews have identified a range of limitations including the inability to clearly link the NPAH outputs and outcomes, and the inability to measure changes in homelessness over the life of the agreement.¹⁹ In addition, the COAG Reform Council noted in its reports about the National Affordable Housing Agreement and supporting national partnerships, that it has been unable to report on the NPAH due to limitations in the available performance information, and the inability to link activity reported by the state and territory governments to the outcomes and objectives of the national agreement. Changes were made to the performance framework in 2012 following the mid-term review of the agreement, but the changes were not sufficiently significant to address the

¹⁹ The reviews include an early assessment of progress undertaken by the COAG Reform Council, reported to government in 2010; the *Heads of Treasuries' Review of National Agreements, National Partnerships and Implementation Plans under the Intergovernmental Agreement on Federal Financial Relations* completed in 2010; and a mid-term review of the NPAH completed by the cross-jurisdictional Homelessness Working Group, undertaken in 2011-12.

original design limitations of the framework, or to better position FaHCSIA to measure overall progress and the impact of the NPAH.

26. The NPAH does not make provision for state and territory financial information to be provided to FaHCSIA. Consequently, FaHCSIA is not able to substantiate whether the state and territory governments are meeting their co-contribution commitments as agreed through the NPAH. This information is reported to the Australian Government Treasury for provision to the Standing Council on Federal Financial Relations, but the Treasury has not been authorised to release this information to administering departments, even where the departments have overall policy responsibility for the agreement. This limits the view that the departments with policy responsibility would normally be expected to have over the performance of the program. There would be benefit, from the Australian Government perspective, in reviewing this approach.

27. Recent trends, as evidenced through changes between the 2006 and 2011 Censuses of Population and Housing, indicate that homelessness has increased. The NPAH's performance target of a 7 per cent reduction in homelessness by 2013 was set against a baseline of 104 676 people, which was an estimate of homelessness in Australia at the time the NPAH was agreed.²⁰ The 2011 census estimated that the homeless population had reached 105 237 people, which is a slight increase over the 2006 estimates used in developing the NPAH. However, the ABS has also estimated that in 2006 the homeless population was in fact much lower than previously estimated, at 89 728 people. As a result, there has been an increase of 17 per cent in the number of homeless people since 2006, on the basis of the census data that is now available. During this period the rate of homelessness (the number of homeless people per 10 000 of the population) also increased but at a proportionally lower rate of 8 per cent.²¹

28. Based on ABS estimates, the number of Indigenous people who were homeless rose by around 3 per cent between 2006 and 2011 against the NPAH

²⁰ The NPAH was based on estimates of homelessness in Australia reflected in the publication *Counting the Homeless 2006*. *Counting the Homeless 2006* while released by the ABS and based on the 2006 Census of Population and Housing and other data sources was not an official count of homelessness in Australia. The ABS released official estimates of homelessness in Australia based on the 2001, 2006 and 2011 censuses during 2012.

²¹ ABS estimates indicate that the rate of homeless increased from 45.2 people per 10 000 of the population in 2006 to 48.9 people per 10 000 of the population in 2011.

benchmark target of a reduction of 33 per cent.²² Census data also shows that Indigenous people are significantly overrepresented in the homeless population at a rate of around 1 in 20 Indigenous people compared to around 1 in 200 people for the population as a whole.

29. The other key benchmark target of the NPAH relates to reducing the number of homeless people sleeping rough by 25 per cent. Although still short of expectations, progress against this target has been more positive with around a 6 per cent reduction in the number of homeless people sleeping rough, according to ABS estimates.²³

30. To achieve its overall goal of halving homelessness by 2020, the Australian Government recognised that a long term commitment would be required and that the funding provided through the NPAH was a 'down payment'. In support of developing effective approaches to addressing homelessness over this long timeframe, there would be benefit during 2013–14 in FaHCSIA evaluating the outcomes achieved under the NPAH to provide insight into how well the agreement is assisting the Australian, state and territory government in meeting the homelessness targets set by COAG. This information could be used to inform the negotiation of any longer-term funding arrangement for homelessness.

31. The NPAH was one of the early national partnerships to be agreed and its implementation has highlighted a number of policy and implementation issues. In support of the negotiation of future funding arrangements for homelessness, there would be benefit in FaHCSIA providing advice to the Australian Government, for its consideration, on key aspects of the design of potential funding arrangements, including: aligning the funding arrangements to the availability of the key data through which performance will be assessed; designing the performance framework in such a way that it supports assessment of service delivery reform and program outcomes; creating payment structures that are more closely related to performance; and finally, requiring the state and territory governments to provide financial information to the responsible policy department, particularly where a co-contribution

²² The ABS has estimated that the number of Indigenous homeless people increased from 25 950 people in 2006 to 26 744 people in 2011. This data is not comparable with data drawn from the *Counting the Homeless 2006*, as at that time the Indigenous homeless population was estimated to be around 9500 people.

²³ The ABS has estimated that 7200 homeless people were sleeping rough in 2006, which decreased to around 6800 homeless people in 2011. In *Counting the Homeless 2006*, it was estimated that around 16 300 homeless people were sleeping rough.

requirement is included. These issues are also matters which may require broader consideration by the Australian Government in respect of other future funding arrangements that operate at a national level.

Overview of the concurrent audit reports

32. The reports prepared by the Western Australian, Victorian, Queensland, Tasmanian and Northern Territory Auditors-General on implementation of the NPAH in their jurisdictions have identified a number of thematic issues. One of the common issues was that despite the implementation of a range of homelessness initiatives, the expected reduction in homelessness will not be achieved in any of these state and territory jurisdictions. This is coupled with a reported lack of focus on measuring the outcomes being achieved or evaluation of the effectiveness of the funded initiatives. Measuring and reporting on activity or outputs, provides information about the services that are being delivered, but this approach to reporting does not provide an insight into the quality, timeliness or longer-term impact of the services.

33. At an administrative level, the Auditors-General identified that the respective governments were generally meeting their performance and financial reporting commitments under the NPAH, but the validity of the reported information could not be established in all instances. While it was not a requirement of the NPAH, reporting to state Parliaments was identified as being inadequate, limiting the level of accountability being provided to the community. There were also variances in the effectiveness of the management arrangements established in each jurisdiction to coordinate and drive activities.

34. The NPAH was designed to promote reform of the homelessness service delivery system with the aim of developing better connected and more integrated services. The Auditors-General have observed that in some cases the additional funding under the NPAH has been used to fund business as usual activities, while in others a greater focus was given to reform of the homelessness service delivery system, which improved the level of interaction between services. To sustain changes in the service delivery system and future service delivery, the need for greater certainty of future funding was also a matter raised in some of the reports by the Auditors-General.

Summary of agency response

35. *FaHCSIA welcomes the ANAO report as an informative and constructive appraisal of the implementation of the National Partnership Agreement on Homelessness. FaHCSIA notes the findings of the report and accepts the Recommendation.*

36. *FaHCSIA particularly notes that changes to the payment structure and performance framework of any longer term homelessness Agreement would allow for improved transparency and accountability of how the Agreement contributes to meeting the ambitious Homelessness White Paper targets. FaHCSIA is considering ways of applying the recommendations of this report and lessons learned to any longer term homelessness Agreement, while also following the guidelines stipulated as part of the Intergovernmental Agreement on Federal Financial Relations.*

Recommendations

The ANAO has made one recommendation to strengthen the design of future funding arrangements involving the delivery of services by the state and territory governments, in particular homelessness services.

Recommendation No. 1

Paragraph 3.47

To better support the administration of any future funding arrangements for homelessness which involve the delivery of services by the state and territory governments, the ANAO recommends that FaHCSIA explore relevant options and provide advice to the Australian Government in respect of:

- (a) aligning the performance framework and key measures with timely, accessible and comparable data to support the monitoring of progress, including implementation of the reform agenda and the impact of the initiatives funded through the NPAH;
- (b) creating a payment structure that relates payments more closely to the achievement of agreed levels of performance, as is the case in some other national partnership agreements;
- (c) the state and territory governments providing financial data to the department to confirm their financial commitments under the funding arrangement are being met; and
- (d) the effectiveness of the existing approaches to addressing homelessness, following an evaluation of the overall impact of the NPAH and the impact of selected key initiatives.

FaHCSIA's response: *Agreed.*

Audit Findings

1. Introduction

This chapter provides an outline of the National Partnership Agreement on Homelessness and the background to its development.

Background

1.1 In Australia it is currently estimated that around 105 000 people are homeless on any given night. Of these people around 6800 will be sleeping rough on the streets, in parks or other public spaces. The remainder will have varying living arrangements, including living in supported accommodation, with family and friends, in extremely overcrowded accommodation, or in boarding houses.²⁴ To address issues of homelessness, the Australian Government released a White Paper in 2008: *The Road Home—A National Approach to Reducing Homelessness* (White Paper). This outlined the Australian Government's commitment to halve homelessness by 2020 and to offer accommodation to all homeless people sleeping rough who need it by 2020.²⁵ According to the White Paper, the responsibility to end homelessness extends to all levels of government, business, the not-for-profit sector and the community, and requires a sustained long-term effort.

1.2 The complex nature of homelessness was discussed in the White Paper which noted that 'homelessness is not just the result of too few houses—its causes are many and varied' including domestic violence, a shortage of affordable housing, unemployment, mental illness, family breakdown and drug and alcohol abuse.²⁶ The White Paper was developed as a national approach to facilitating the improvement of existing programs and services in addressing and preventing homelessness.

1.3 Services to address homelessness are primarily provided by state and territory government agencies, often using third party service providers. Such services can include crisis accommodation, domestic violence prevention,

²⁴ Based on the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) estimates of homelessness in Australia—2049.0—*Census of Population and Housing: Estimating homelessness*, 2011, p. 2, released 12 November 2012.

²⁵ Australian Government, *The Road Home—A National Approach to Reducing Homelessness*, Canberra, 2008, p. viii.

The definition of homelessness used by the Australian Government prior to the development of a statistical definition of homelessness in 2012, categorises sleeping rough as those people who have no conventional accommodation and consequently live on the streets, in deserted buildings, parks or other public spaces.

²⁶ *ibid.*, p. iii.

mental health, and family and financial counselling. In support of the White Paper, a key part of the Australian Government's strategy for reducing and preventing homelessness was the provision of additional funding for homeless services and associated service delivery reform in the state and territory-based systems through two national partnership agreements.

National Partnership Agreement on Homelessness

1.4 National partnership agreements are a funding mechanism designed to provide state and territory governments with flexibility in service delivery while, at the same time, assisting the Australian Government to achieve mutually agreed policy outcomes and reform in areas of national importance. Homelessness is considered by the Council of Australian Governments (COAG)²⁷ to be an area of national importance. Accordingly, in November 2008, COAG agreed to allocate funding of \$1.2 billion over four years (2009–10 through to 2012–13) to reduce homelessness in Australia.²⁸ To give effect to this, COAG entered into two agreements—the National Partnership Agreement on Homelessness (NPAH) (\$800 million) and the National Partnership Agreement on Social Housing²⁹ (\$400 million). An existing initiative, *A Place to Call Home*,³⁰ was also incorporated into the NPAH. This increased the funding available through the NPAH from \$800 million to \$1.1 billion and brought the Australian Government's specific contribution to \$550 million.

1.5 COAG has emphasised that reducing homelessness '...will require all governments to pursue improvements to a wide range of policies, programs and services.'³¹ Key reforms identified in both the White Paper and NPAH are aimed at increasing the focus on preventing homelessness, improving and expanding services and preventing the recurrence of homelessness. The NPAH

²⁷ COAG is the peak intergovernmental forum in Australia. The members of COAG are the Prime Minister, state and territory premiers and chief ministers and the President of the Australian Local Government Association.

²⁸ Of this funding the Australian Government is contributing \$800 million with the remainder being provided by the state and territory governments.

²⁹ The National Partnership Agreement on Social Housing was a two year agreement aimed at increasing the supply of social housing, providing approximately 1600 to 2100 additional dwellings by 2009–10, and providing opportunities to grow the not-for-profit housing sector.

³⁰ A Place to Call Home is a joint initiative of the Australian and state and territory governments to build 600 new homes for individuals and families experiencing homelessness. The initiative commenced in July 2008 but was rolled into the NPAH.

³¹ Council of Australian Governments, *National Partnership Agreement on Homelessness*, Canberra, 2009, p. 3.

also established a vision of the desired homelessness service delivery system, noting that:

A better connected service system is a key to achieving long-term sustainable reductions in the number of people who are homeless. Reforms to the service system will build more connected, integrated and responsive services which achieve sustainable housing, and improve economic and social participation of those at risk of homelessness. Improved links between homelessness services, and between homelessness services and mainstream services, will improve outcomes for individuals, reduce duplicate processing across agencies, and enable faster transition from temporary accommodation for the homeless to stable housing. Improved integration of homelessness services, employment and training providers and Centrelink will lift economic and social participation outcomes for people who are [homeless].³²

1.6 Reform of the homelessness service delivery system was expected to be facilitated through the implementation of the NPAH, with the underlying state and territory implementation plans translating the strategy foreshadowed in the NPAH, and to a lesser extent the White Paper, into a series of measurable initiatives aimed at reducing, preventing and/or breaking the cycle of homelessness. Recognising the long term nature of the reforms, the Australian Government noted that the additional funding for homelessness being provided through the NPAH 'is a down payment on the 12 year reform agenda'.³³

1.7 The NPAH commenced in January 2009 with the aim of reducing, preventing and breaking the cycle of homeless, while increasing the social inclusion of people experiencing homelessness. The four key outcomes set out in the NPAH are that:

- fewer people will become homeless and fewer of these will sleep rough;
- fewer people will become homeless more than once;
- people at risk of experiencing homelessness will maintain or improve connections with their families and communities, and maintain or improve their education, training or employment participation; and

³² *ibid.*, p. 6.

³³ Australian Government, *The Road Home—A National Approach to Reducing Homelessness*, Canberra, 2008, p. iii.

- people at risk of experiencing homelessness will be supported by quality services, with improved access to sustainable housing.³⁴

1.8 The NPAH comprises a series of bilateral agreements between the Australian Government and each state and territory government under which the Australian Government is principally responsible for providing funding to the state and territory governments for homelessness measures. The Australian Government, through the Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs (FaHCSIA), also supports the state and territory governments in delivering the funded measures, and monitors and reports on progress.³⁵ In line with the agreed accountability for national partnership agreements, the Australian Government Minister for Housing and Homelessness, supported by FaHCSIA, is responsible for policy, implementation and evaluation.³⁶ The state and territory governments, in addition to having primary responsibility for service delivery, are required to make funding contributions and to meet the financial and performance reporting requirements of the NPAH. The governance arrangements supporting implementation of the NPAH are shown in Figure 1.1 on the following page.

³⁴ Council of Australian Governments, *National Partnership Agreement on Homelessness*, Canberra, 2009, p. 5.

COAG expected that the outcomes of the NPAH would be achieved through the delivery of four core outputs and a number of additional outputs by each state and territory. These are presented in Appendix 2.

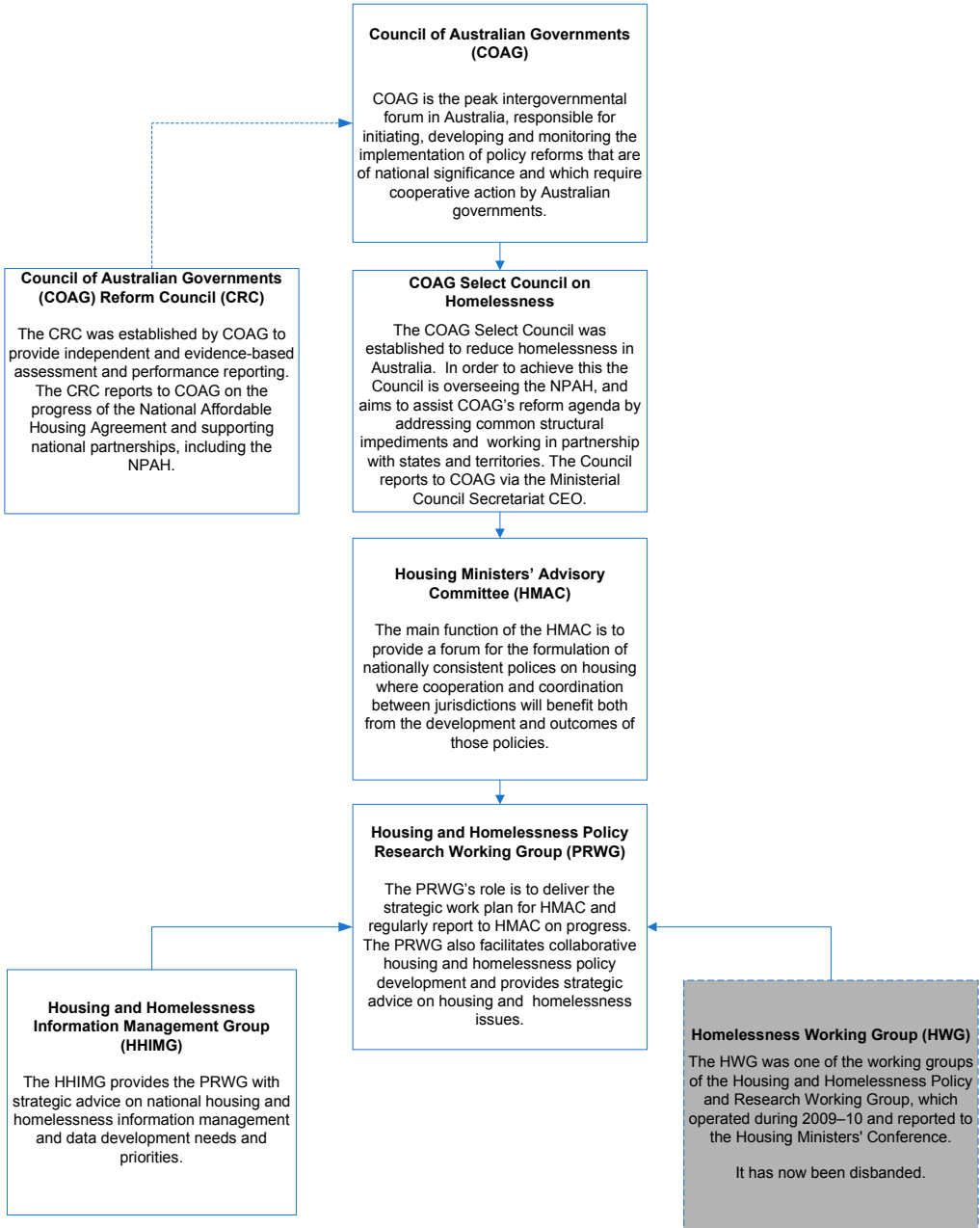
³⁵ The Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs is the lead Australian Government agency responsible for homelessness policy and implementation of the NPAH.

³⁶ COAG Standing Council on Federal Financial Relations, *Federal Financial Relations Circular No. 2009/03—Accountabilities Under the New Federal Financial Relations Framework*, 3 April 2009, p. 7.

Since 2007, the Ministerial role of housing and homelessness has been referred to variously as the Minister for Housing, the Minister for Social Housing and Homelessness, and the Minister for Housing and Homelessness. Any subsequent references to the Minister for Housing and Homelessness (the Minister) refer collectively to these roles.

Figure 1.1

Governance arrangements for the NPAH



Source: ANAO based on FaHCSIA and COAG information.

1.9 Australian Government funding available to support the delivery of the NPAH is to be matched by funding from the state and territory governments, with the funding allocated to the expansion of existing services and implementation of new initiatives. Australian Government funding was allocated to the state and territory governments based on an estimate of their respective share of the homeless population in 2006.³⁷ The NPAH funding allocation and estimates of the homeless population at that time are presented in Table 1.1. Total funding available exceeds the \$1.1 billion stated in the NPAH as several of the state and territory governments are providing additional funding for a range of homelessness initiatives above those agreed in the NPAH.

Table 1.1

Funding arrangements under the NPAH

Jurisdiction	Homeless population 2006 ¹	Australian Government funding (\$ millions)	State/Territory co-contributions (\$ millions)
Australian Capital Territory	1364	10.1	10.1
New South Wales	27 374	140.4	251.9
Northern Territory	4785	25.6	29.4
Queensland	26 782	135.1	148.9
South Australia	7962	40.6	41.4
Tasmania	2507	14.3	18.6
Victoria	20 511	105.7	104.0
Western Australia	13 391	66.8	68.4
Commonwealth Own Purpose Expenditure (research agenda)	–	11.4	–
Total	104 676	550.0	672.7
Total combined funding²		1 222.7	

Source: Australian National Audit Office analysis of COAG data and *Counting the Homeless 2006*.

Note 1: Based on estimates from *Counting the Homeless 2006*. This publication was a cooperative effort between two universities and several Australia Government agencies and was the definitive source of homelessness data in Australia at that time. The ABS has since estimated that on Census night 2006, 89 728 people were homeless, rather than the 104 676 estimated in *Counting the Homeless 2006*.

Note 2: Total funding available exceeds the \$1.1 billion stated in the NPAH as several of the state and territory governments are providing additional funding for a range of homelessness initiatives above those agreed in the NPAH.

³⁷ Council of Australian Governments, *National Partnership Agreement on Homelessness*, Canberra, 2009, p. 9.

1.10 As noted in paragraph 1.6, the additional funding provided through the NPAH was considered to be a ‘down-payment’ on the longer term reform agenda. The NPAH was initially due to expire on 30 June 2013, but the Australian and state and territory governments agreed in March 2013 to enter into a one-year transitional partnership agreement for 2013–14, while negotiations continue on a new longer-term agreement.³⁸

1.11 In addition to facilitating the service delivery reforms described in paragraph 1.5, the NPAH seeks to reduce the number of homeless people overall by 7 per cent, Indigenous homelessness by 33 per cent and the number of homeless people sleeping rough by 25 per cent, each by 2013. These performance targets were based on data drawn from the study, *Counting the Homeless 2006*, that estimated that 104 676 people were homeless in Australia, of whom 9525 were Indigenous. Of the homeless population it was also estimated that 16 375 people were sleeping rough.³⁹ Accordingly, a 7 per cent reduction in the number of homeless people in Australia would result in a homeless population of 97 350 people by 2013. Based on this data, to reach the targets set for Indigenous homelessness would require a reduction in their numbers to fewer than 6300 people. Similarly, to reach the target for homeless people sleeping rough would require a reduction in their numbers to fewer than 12 300 people.

Homelessness in Australia

1.12 In the foreword to the White Paper, the Australian Government stated that ‘[in] a country as prosperous as Australia, no one should be homeless’.⁴⁰ However, the drivers, causes and triggers of homelessness are recognised as being complex. Poverty and the inability to afford adequate housing are often central causes.⁴¹ Many people who experience homelessness have struggled with significant personal disadvantage throughout their lives and their path to homelessness may have started many years earlier. Vulnerability to homelessness is heightened during important life transitions, such as moving

³⁸ The National Partnership Agreement on Social Housing expired at the end of 2009–10.

³⁹ Chamberlain. C. and MacKenzie. D., *Counting the Homeless 2006*, Canberra, 2008, p. x.

⁴⁰ Australian Government, op. cit. pp. 6–10.

⁴¹ Australian Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission, *Homelessness is a Human Rights Issue*, 2008, <http://www.hreoc.gov.au/human_rights/housing/homelessness_2008.html#fnB1> [accessed 13 April 2012].

from school to work, leaving the child protection system, family breakdown, leaving prison, retirement or relocating.⁴²

1.13 Poor health is a common problem for people experiencing homelessness. Homeless people are at risk of contracting a variety of infections and communicable diseases, and generally suffer a wide range of chronic medical conditions. For homeless people sleeping rough, the dangers of life on the streets can lead to a mistrust of others and social isolation, increasing their risk of developing psychiatric conditions. Substance abuse, depression and personality disorders are common and can be the result of homelessness at least as frequently as its cause.⁴³

Measuring homelessness in Australia

1.14 Until 2012, when the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) released estimates of homelessness based on the 2001, 2006 and 2011 Censuses of Population and Housing, the definitive source of homelessness data had been the *Counting the Homeless* studies. These studies were a cooperative effort between two universities and several Australian Government agencies, with contributions from the ABS. In response to growing concern about the meaning of homelessness, and the process of measuring it, the ABS developed a statistical definition of homelessness in 2012⁴⁴ and subsequently released in late 2012 estimates of homelessness based on the last three censuses. Due to the different definitions of homelessness, the ABS estimates differ significantly from those presented in *Counting the Homeless 2006*. This has implications for the NPAH, which was designed using the earlier estimates to establish the original baselines and benchmark targets. These implications are discussed further in Chapter 3: Performance Monitoring and Reporting.

⁴² Australian Government, *Which Way Home? A New Approach to Homelessness*, Canberra, 2008, p. 24.

⁴³ C. Lloyd, and H. Bassett, 'The Role of an Australian Homeless Health Outreach Team: Part 1: Background', *International Journal of Therapy and Rehabilitation*, 17(7), 2010, pp.290–295.

⁴⁴ In summary, the ABS considers that a person is homeless when they are living in a dwelling that is inadequate, have no tenure or their initial tenure is short and not extendable, or their current living arrangements do not allow them to have control of and access to space for social relations.

Audit objective, scope and methodology

1.15 The objective of this audit was to examine the effectiveness of the Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs' administration of the NPAH, including monitoring and reporting of progress against the objective and outcomes of the agreement.

1.16 Three high level criteria were used to conclude against the audit objective. These were whether:

- FaHCSIA's administrative arrangements supported the effective implementation of the NPAH across all jurisdictions;
- program implementation arrangements are supporting the effective delivery of homelessness services, specifically initiatives directly funded by the Australian Government; and
- progress against the NPAH targets and state and territory implementation plans is being regularly monitored and assessed, and is meeting expectations in relation to improving homelessness.

Audit methodology

1.17 The Australian Council of Auditors-General agreed in 2010 to increase collaboration, where appropriate, in the conduct of performance audits on topics that have a national dimension. The NPAH was chosen as the topic for the first concurrent audit, and six state and territory Auditors-General have completed or are undertaking similar audits.⁴⁵

1.18 A common audit objective and criteria were developed to support the concurrent audit approach. The objective of the state and territory jurisdiction audits was to examine whether or not the relevant government agencies were meeting their obligations under the NPAH, and whether or not the NPAH was making a difference for homeless people. The Australian National Audit Office (ANAO), in preparing this report, has considered the findings of the reports completed by the state and territory Auditors-General.⁴⁶

⁴⁵ Audits of the NPAH have been or are being undertaken in the Australian Capital Territory, the Northern Territory, Queensland, Victoria, Tasmania and Western Australia. Reports of the audits have been or will be tabled in the relevant state and territory Parliaments.

⁴⁶ As of 16 April 2013, the Auditors-General of Western Australia, Victoria and Queensland, Tasmania and the Northern Territory had tabled their reports.

1.19 In conducting the audit, documents relating to the NPAH held by FaHCSIA were examined by the ANAO as well as publicly available COAG reports and communiqués. Members of the audit team also interviewed selected departmental staff, including staff from the responsible state and territory government departments, private sector entities involved in delivering homelessness programs on behalf of the state and territory governments; and other key stakeholders such as representatives from non-government organisations and the Prime Minister’s Council on Homelessness.

1.20 The audit was conducted in accordance with the ANAO auditing standards at a cost of \$ 286 546.

Report structure

1.21 The structure of the report is outlined in Figure 1.2.

Figure 1.2

Report structure

Chapter	Chapter overview
2. Implementation	Examines the implementation by FaHCSIA of its responsibilities under the NPAH.
3. Performance Monitoring and Reporting	Discusses FaHCSIA’s role in the ongoing monitoring of the NPAH and the effectiveness of the performance assessment arrangements developed for the NPAH.
4. Overview of the Concurrent Audit Reports	Presents an overview of the key findings from the concurrent audit reports of the state and territory Auditors-General on the implementation of the NPAH in their respective jurisdictions.

2. Implementation

This chapter examines the implementation by the Department of Families Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs of its responsibilities under the NPAH.

Introduction

2.1 The NPAH is an arrangement between the Australian and state and territory governments to address key aspects of homelessness through a jointly funded effort. The NPAH is based on three key strategies. The first is a focus on early intervention and prevention to stop people becoming homeless and to reduce the impact of homelessness. The second strategy relates to breaking the cycle of homelessness through investment in services to assist homeless people. The third key strategy is to build a more connected service delivery system with the aim of achieving long-term and sustainable reductions in the number of people who are homeless.

2.2 FaHCSIA, as the Australian Government's lead agency for homelessness policy, has several roles in respect the NPAH. These include planning for and co-ordination of overall implementation, supporting the states and territories in developing their implementation plans, facilitating payments to the states and territories, and delivering specific research measures. In accordance with the NPAH and Intergovernmental Agreement on Federal Financial Relations, FaHCSIA is also responsible for monitoring and reporting of progress against the NPAH outcomes and outputs; this aspect of the department's role is discussed in Chapter 3: Performance Monitoring and Reporting.

Implementation planning

Developing the state and territory implementation plans

2.3 National partnership agreements generally have taken a structured approach to planning. This was also the case for the NPAH which required each state and territory government to develop an implementation plan to be agreed with the Australian Government Minister responsible for homelessness. These plans were expected to be in place from within three months of the NPAH commencing to allow for early agreement between the respective jurisdiction and the Australian Government on priorities and expected performance. Approval of the implementation plans was an

important opportunity for the Australian Government to influence implementation priorities and directions.

2.4 Prior to assessing each of the state and territory governments' implementation plans, FaHCSIA, in consultation with the Minister, established a negotiation position on behalf of the Australian Government. FaHCSIA advised that in its negotiations with the state and territory government departments it advocated for the inclusion of new programs and services, for a balance between capital and recurrent funding allocations, and for the Australian Government's funding contribution to be matched with additional or new funding. Following its review of the proposed implementation plans, against this negotiation position, FaHCSIA provided feedback to the respective state or territory departments for their consideration. Matters generally raised included seeking further explanation of how the proposed initiatives are expected to contribute to an overall reduction in homelessness and the agreed national targets, and address each of the four core outcomes of the NPAH. Where necessary revised plans were resubmitted to FaHCSIA for further review and were subsequently provided to the Minister for agreement.

2.5 Overall, the state and territory governments have applied funding under the NPAH to a combination of new initiatives and the expansion of existing services. Table 2.1 presents a summary of whether the initiatives funded under the NPAH in each state and territory jurisdiction are new or existing, where the information is available. While FAHCSIA advocated for a balance in the allocation of the funding between capital and service delivery, no specific requirements exists under the NPAH for how funding is to be allocated. Overall, the states and territories have adopted different approaches, for example, the Western Australian Government allocated a significant quantity of NPAH funding to capital projects, while the South Australian Government allocated its NPAH funding largely to homelessness support services. The level of detail on the state territory financial contributions in the implementation plans varies across the jurisdictions, but the implementation plans indicate that the state and territory governments were proposing to match the Australian Government's funding.

Table 2.1**Summary of initiatives funded under the NPAH**

State or territory	Total number of initiatives	Number of new initiatives	Number of existing initiatives—expanded
Australian Capital Territory	35	9	26
New South Wales	36	Not available	Not available
Northern Territory	22	17	5
Queensland	53	29	24
South Australia	66	25	41
Tasmania	22	5	17
Victoria	19	Not available	Not available
Western Australia	20	Not available	Not available
Total	273		

Source: ANAO analysis of the state and territory jurisdiction implementation plans.

Note: The total number of initiatives exceeds the 180 referenced by FaHCSIA in publicly available information. The classification of funded measures as initiatives was affected by the information not being presented consistently in the state and territory governments' implementation plans. The ANAO has classified discrete services or activities as initiatives where this information was available.

2.6 The establishment of a clear negotiation position enabled FaHCSIA to take a consistent approach to reviewing the proposed implementation plans, but this process could have been better supported by the department more strongly focusing on whether the proposed initiatives and mix of services would most effectively contribute to the achievement of the outcomes of the NPAH. The implementation plans give attention to the implementation of funded initiatives, but generally lack a clear focus on the achievement and measurement of outcomes, sustainability of outcomes, and the quality of homelessness services.

2.7 The NPAH was also premised on reform of the homelessness service delivery system with 'all governments to pursue improvements to a wide range of policies, programs and services'.⁴⁷ The level of reform proposed by each state and territory has varied across Australia. FaHCSIA in reviewing the

⁴⁷ Council of Australian Governments, *National Partnership Agreement on Homelessness*, Canberra, January 2009, p.3.

implementation plans noted instances of comprehensive reform aimed at positioning particular state or territory jurisdictions to deliver on the intent of the NPAH. At the other end of the spectrum, FaHCSIA also noted in some jurisdictions a proliferation of small measures which built on existing services and lacked an innovative approach.⁴⁸ While FaHCSIA supported the state and territory governments in developing their implementation plans, some of the jurisdictions may have benefited from further guidance from FaHCSIA so that a more consistent approach to levels of reform ambition could have been promoted, accepting that decisions on particular measures adopted were properly matters for each state and territory government.

Ministerial agreement of the state and territory implementation plans

2.8 Following completion of the implementation plans by the state and territory governments and agreement at a departmental level, FaHCSIA provided the plans to the Minister for consideration and agreement. Detailed briefings on all of the implementation plans, including highlighting their strengths and weaknesses, were provided to the Minister for consideration.

2.9 The state and territory implementation plans were to be finalised by 31 March 2009, approximately three months after the NPAH was agreed. Table 2.2 shows the actual timeframes for the finalisation and agreement of the state and territory implementation plans. The plans took, on average, six months to draft, negotiate and agree. While this was twice as long as initially envisaged in the NPAH, more recent guidance from the Australian Government Treasury (the Treasury) issued in December 2011 suggests that implementation plans should be developed within six months of national partnership agreements being signed.

⁴⁸ A similar issue was raised by some of the state Auditors-General in their reports on the implementation of the NPAH. This issue is discussed further in Chapter 4.

Table 2.2**Approval of implementation plans**

State/Territory	Date approved by the Minister
Western Australia	15 June 2009
Tasmania	26 June 2009
South Australia	29 June 2009
Victoria	29 June 2009
Queensland	29 June 2009
Australian Capital Territory	11 July 2009
New South Wales	15 July 2009
Northern Territory	20 August 2009

Source: ANAO analysis of FaHCSIA information.

Outputs to be delivered by states and territories

2.10 Initiatives implemented by the state and territory governments were to contribute to the agreed outputs of the NPAH. Four core outputs were identified for priority attention by the state and territory governments. These were:

- implementation of *A Place to Call Home*;
- street-to-home initiatives for chronic homeless people (rough sleepers);
- support for private and public tenants to help sustain their tenancies, including through tenancy support, advocacy, case management, financial counselling and referral services; and
- assistance for people leaving child protection services, correctional and health facilities, to access and maintain stable, affordable housing.⁴⁹

2.11 Examination of the implementation plans indicates that there was considerable variation between the states and territories in relation to coverage of the four core outputs. In Victoria around 40 per cent of initiatives have been identified as contributing to the four core outputs while in Queensland these figures were around 75 per cent.

⁴⁹ Council of Australian Governments, *National Partnership Agreement on Homelessness*, January 2009, p.5.

The NPAH outputs are presented in full in Appendix 2.

2.12 The state and territory governments could also then choose to give attention to a range of additional outputs according to the needs of the jurisdictions. Each implementation plan was required to identify the output or outputs an initiative contributed to. The data in Table 2.3 presents the number of initiatives identified in each state and territory as contributing to each output, expressed as a percentage of the total number of initiatives funded in that jurisdiction. The information is not linked to the dollar value of the measures, as this data was not readily available or comparable across jurisdictions. Initiatives can contribute to more than one output, consequently, the data provides only an indication of the coverage of funded activities as a whole.

2.13 Table 2.3 on the following page shows that there is a significant variation in the approach to homelessness service delivery in each state and territory, with different jurisdictions attributing their efforts to different areas. For example, in Victoria maintaining stable accommodation was the service category to which most initiatives were identified as contributing to, while in Queensland this service category was contributed to by very few initiatives. Similarly, there were varying levels of emphasis given to services supporting women and children experiencing domestic and family violence, and to youth specific services.

Table 2.3**Per cent attribution of initiatives to the NPAH outputs and service categories by jurisdiction**

Output grouping	Service category	ACT %	NSW %	NT %	QLD %	SA %	VIC %	TAS %	WA %
Core outputs	Accommodation and/or housing	14.6	1.8	1.1	2.0	2.2	1.9	5.6	6.0
	Sleeping rough	4.9	9.1	13.8	13.7	10.8	1.9	11.1	6.0
	Tenancy support	36.6	6.5	9.2	29.4	4.3	1.9	9.3	8.0
	Support-people leaving care or institutions.	9.8	15.6	13.8	35.5	12.9	11.6	22.2	14.0
Sub-total		65.9	33.0	37.9	80.6	30.2	17.3	48.2	34.0
Additional outputs	Support services to help homeless maintain stable accommodation	2.4	37.8	21.8	2.0	35.5	46.2	14.8	34.0
	Domestic and family violence	7.3	4.7	3.5	2.0	6.5	5.9	0.0	6.0
	Youth specific services: re-engagement and education	17.1	6.2	5.7	3.9	4.3	7.7	18.5	8.0
	Service coordination	7.3	10.9	1.1	9.8	15.1	7.7	13.0	6.0
	Action planning	0.0	1.5	25.3	0.0	3.2	0.0	1.9	0.0
	Legal services	0.0	5.8	3.4	0.0	5.4	3.9	3.7	6.0
	Sector development	0.0	0.0	1.1	2.0	0.0	11.6	0.0	6.0
Sub-total		34.0	66.9	61.9	19.7	70.0	83	51.9	66.0
Total		100.0	99.9	99.8	100.3	100.2	100.3	100.1	100.0

Source: ANAO analysis of state and territory jurisdiction implementation plans.

Note: The totals for each state do not add to one hundred due to rounding.

Note: Where a value has been recorded as zero, no NPAH funded homelessness initiatives have been identified as contributing. However, as homelessness service delivery is part of a broader interrelated service delivery system these services may be being delivered and funded through another program or their contribution may have been attributed to another service category.

Note: The data presents the number of initiatives identified as contributing to a single output expressed as a percentage of the total number of initiatives funded in a jurisdiction. The data is illustrative of overall coverage, but not representative of the size of initiatives or funding allocated, as this information was not comparable across jurisdictions. The data presented is dependent upon how the state and territory governments chose in their implementation plans to attribute initiatives to the NPAH core and additional outputs.

Facilitating payments to the states and territories

2.14 As part of its responsibilities under the NPAH, the Australian Government is required to make payments to the state and territory governments. These payments are made monthly and were classified in the NPAH as facilitation payments. Federal finances circulars describe facilitation payments as payments made to assist the state or territory governments to improve service delivery and/or to provide the capacity for the state or territory governments to implement reform activities. Facilitation payments are generally not subject to the state and territory governments meeting specific performance requirements and are usually made automatically in accordance with an agreed schedule.

2.15 The two other categories of payments used in national partnerships are project payments and reward payments. Project payments support the delivery of specific services and/or achievement of specified outputs and involve the provision of a set level of funding at specified times. Depending on the actual agreement, project payments may be subject to the state and territory governments achieving agreed performance benchmarks and standards. Reward payments are also used in some national partnerships and are linked to the delivery of reforms. Reward payments are contingent on the state and territory governments achieving agreed performance benchmarks, as assessed by the COAG Reform Council.

2.16 The Intergovernmental Agreement on Federal Financial Relations sets out that payments can either be automatic or subject to a determination by the relevant Australian Government Minister. Payments are automatic in cases where the national partnership agreement does not require the achievement of a specific performance milestone or benchmark before payment can be made. These payments are scheduled in accordance with the payment arrangements agreed in the national partnership. In cases where achievement of a pre-determined milestone or performance benchmark is required, the Australian Government Minister is to make a determination as to whether the payment should be made.

2.17 In reaching agreement on the NPAH, COAG adopted a mixed approach to the payment arrangements. Formally, payments are classified in the NPAH as facilitation payments, are made monthly in advance, and have not been linked to the achievement of any particular performance benchmark. However, the continuation of monthly payments was made 'subject to an annual review of achievement of performance milestones agreed in

Implementation Plans.⁵⁰ This has resulted in payments made under the NPAH more closely aligning with the definition of project payments.

2.18 An annual review of progress is undertaken by FaHCSIA on the basis of information provided in the state and territory annual reports on progress. These reports are required to be submitted to FaHCSIA no later than 12 weeks after the end of the preceding financial year. FaHCSIA then reviews the reports and provides advice to the Minister in respect of making a determination on whether the monthly payments should continue. In addition to the Ministerial determination arrangements, a process of monthly payment certification by FaHCSIA to the Treasury is also in place. This is to confirm that payments are accurate and in accordance with the terms of the agreement.

2.19 The NPAH does not provide any guidance on the timeframe in which FaHCSIA is required to complete the annual reviews of progress, or the timeframe in which the Minister is required to make payment determinations in respect of the payments to state and territory governments. Due to the timing of the annual reporting and review process, the Australian Government continues to make monthly payments prior to FaHCSIA's review and advice to the Minister. From a public accountability perspective, it would be reasonable to expect that the review would occur in a timely manner after the submission of annual reports so as to limit the time period for which payments are made in the absence of an assessment of progress. The design of the reporting and review process meant, however, that payments were made for the initial 17 months of the NPAH before any formal review activity occurred and that in most years, at least five months of payments will be made prior to any formal assessment of progress.⁵¹ This is in line with the agreement reached by COAG for the NPAH, however, it does not support early feedback on program performance.⁵²

Planning and managing the research agenda

2.20 One of FaHCSIA's specific responsibilities in the NPAH was to develop and lead a research program focusing on homelessness. The need for a

⁵⁰ Council of Australian Governments; *National Partnership Agreement on Homelessness*, Canberra, 2009, p. 10.

⁵¹ In 2011–12, as a result of machinery of government and ministerial changes, the payment determination was not made by the Minister until May 2012, 11 months into the new payment cycle.

⁵² *Federal Finances Circular No. 2011/01—Payment Accountability and Certification Arrangements*, confirms that payments are effectively automatic if not linked to the achievement of a performance milestone or benchmark.

long-term research agenda on the issue of homelessness was first formally identified in the White Paper, which noted that research was needed to improve the evidence base on which governments' responses to homelessness were based.

2.21 The NPAH allocated \$11.4 million to FaHCSIA for research activities and the department developed and released the National Homelessness Research Agenda in November 2009. The research agenda aims to provide a guiding framework for building a cohesive evidence base for preventing and responding to homelessness and was designed to fill gaps in the existing research base. The research gaps identified in the agenda are:

- longitudinal studies and quantitative data;
- research on service system capacity and effectiveness;
- research on understanding homelessness, including the impacts of early intervention, maintaining social connections and social reintegration programs;
- research on people with complex needs who are homeless;
- inter-sectoral research on resilience, the lifelong consequences of homelessness and intergenerational issues;
- research on the geography of homelessness, in particular, rural and regional homelessness; and
- research on housing options for women affected by domestic violence.

2.22 To give effect to the research agenda, FaHCSIA implemented several initiatives:

- research partnership agreements—a limited number of substantial multi-year partnerships delivering an agreed program of research focused on answering research questions that are complex and/or longitudinal in nature;
- research projects—smaller research projects of national significance that focus on the priorities of the research agenda; and
- a longitudinal study of homelessness—*Journeys Home—Longitudinal Survey of Factors Affecting Housing Stability* (Journeys Home).

2.23 All research funded through the NPAH has been allocated through open tender processes. In April 2010, the Minister announced the successful applicants for the research partnership agreements, these were the:

- niversity of Queensland (Institute of Social Science Research);
- Swinburne University of Technology (Institute for Social Research); and
- Flinders University of South Australia (Flinders Partners).

Each research partner was funded around \$1.4 million over four years. Projects being delivered under the research partnerships are presented in Appendix 4.

2.24 The major discrete research project funded through the NPAH was Journeys Home. The project aims to improve the understanding of, and policy response to, the diverse social, economic and personal factors related to homelessness and the risk of becoming homeless. The Melbourne Institute of Applied Economic and Social Research from the University of Melbourne was selected to undertake Journeys Home and has been funded \$5.4 million for the project.

Journeys Home—a longitudinal study of factors affecting housing stability

Journeys Home attempts to combine de-identified administrative information held by Centrelink with survey data for a random sample of over 1600 income support recipients across Australia. The selected respondents represent three sub-populations of Centrelink customers. Those flagged by Centrelink as homeless, those flagged as at risk of homelessness and a third category, vulnerable to homelessness, as identified by the researchers. The survey is being conducted over four waves, each six months apart, from September 2011 to the first half of 2013. The first report was released through the Australian Homelessness Clearinghouse. Key early key findings of the study are that:

- 90 per cent of participants had been homeless at some stage in their lives, and 51 per cent of participants had been homeless in the past six months;
- the most common reason for first becoming homeless was family breakdown and/or conflict;
- only seven per cent reported mental illness and ten per cent substance abuse as major factors leading to their first homeless experience;
- 71 per cent of those homeless for a total of four years or more in their lifetime had been diagnosed with at least one of the five mental illnesses listed in the survey;
- half the participants first experienced homelessness while aged under 18 years and just under three quarters before they turned 25;
- people who first experience homelessness at a young age are more likely to experience persistent homelessness; and
- a third of those who first experienced homelessness under the age of 15 spent a total of four years or more homeless during their lifetimes.⁵³

⁵³ Melbourne Institute of Applied Economics and Social Research and the Department of Families, Housing Community Services and Indigenous Affairs, *Journeys Home Research Report No. 1—Wave 1 findings*, July 2012. Available at: <http://homelessnessclearinghouse.govspace.gov.au/files/2012/08/JHW1report.pdf>.

2.25 Research is valuable in providing an evidence base for developing policy and targeting homelessness programs. Previous homelessness research had been largely qualitative, small scale and sub-group specific. The homelessness research agenda was designed to fill existing research gaps and research funded under the NPAH blends a mix of small scale subject specific projects with larger projects, such as Journeys Home. While the homelessness research has been valuable in understanding homelessness in Australia, going forward, there would be benefit in any additional Australian Government funded research being strategically targeted towards understanding the effectiveness of existing interventions and the impact of the NPAH on homelessness, given that there was no provision in the NPAH for an evaluation.

Conclusion

2.26 FaHCSIA is the lead Australian Government agency responsible for overall implementation of the NPAH in collaboration with the state and territory governments. At the commencement of the NPAH, FaHCSIA gave consideration to key aspects of program implementation and administration. It developed processes for the negotiation and approval of the state and territory implementation plans in line with the requirements and expectations of the NPAH. This included FaHCSIA providing feedback to the respective state or territory departments for their consideration. However, to effectively influence reform of the homelessness sector and achievement of the NPAH outcomes, FaHCSIA could have given greater attention to assessing how the more than 180 proposed initiatives would collectively contribute to preventing, reducing and breaking the cycle of homelessness in order to achieve the 7 per cent reduction in homelessness envisaged by COAG. The implementation plans give attention to the implementation of funded initiatives, but generally lacked a clear focus on the achievement, measurement and sustainability of outcomes, and the quality of homelessness services.

2.27 NPAH payments are made by the Australian Government to the state and territory governments on a monthly basis in accordance with the agreed payment schedule. These payments are not linked to the achievement of specific milestone or performance benchmarks. However, an annual review of overall progress by the state and territories is undertaken by FaHCSIA to enable the Minister to make a determination to continue the monthly payments in accordance with the requirements of the Intergovernmental Agreement on Federal Financial Relations and related federal finances

circulars. Due to the timing of the annual reporting process, there is a limited relationship between actual progress and the determination by the Minister, as payments have already been made for the period to which the annual reports on progress relate, and in most years five months of payments will generally be made before the review and determination process is completed. This is in line with the agreement reached by COAG for the NPAH, however, it does not support early feedback on program progress.

3. Performance Monitoring and Reporting

This chapter discusses the Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs' role in the ongoing monitoring of the NPAH and the effectiveness of the performance assessment arrangements developed for the NPAH.

Introduction

3.1 A well developed monitoring and reporting framework is critical to support the effective administration of government programs. Monitoring is important throughout the life of a program, and in this case enables FaHCSIA to assess the extent to which the state and territory jurisdictions are complying with their obligations and responsibilities under the NPAH. The ANAO examined the:

- performance framework for the NPAH;
- annual review of the state and territory implementation plans;
- internal and external reporting in relation to the NPAH; and
- progress being achieved and changes in the homeless population.

Performance framework

3.2 Monitoring performance is a key aspect of sound program management which enables program managers to assess and report progress to internal and external stakeholders. The NPAH is being delivered in all Australian jurisdictions, but with a common set of outcomes, outputs and performance indicators. A well developed performance framework should enable the measurement of progress towards the expected outcomes, as well as the delivery of outputs and the contributions they are making to the outcomes. Developing and agreeing approaches to measuring performance are best done prior to the implementation of a program or very early in its implementation. Regular review of the effectiveness of performance frameworks is also important as part of ongoing program management.

3.3 COAG identified four outcomes to be achieved as a result of activities funded through the NPAH. These are that:

- (a) Fewer people will become homeless and fewer of these will sleep rough;
- (b) Fewer people will become homeless more than once;
- (c) People at risk of experiencing homelessness will maintain or improve connections with their families and communities, and or maintain or improve their education, training or employment participation; and
- (d) People at risk of experiencing homelessness will be supported by quality services, with improved access to sustainable housing.⁵⁴

3.4 These outcomes were to be achieved through the delivery of four core outputs and a range of related additional outputs by the state and territory governments, as discussed in paragraphs 2.10 and 2.13.

3.5 The NPAH performance framework was developed at the commencement of the agreement and included performance indicators, baselines and benchmark targets. These indicators and benchmarks largely reflected the NPAH's four outcomes, however, as discussed in paragraphs 3.7 to 3.10 there are a range of limitations in relation to data sources which restrict the actual measurement of progress toward these outcomes over the life of the agreement. The performance framework provided less support to FaHCSIA in relation to assessing the delivery of the outputs, as performance indicators were not developed for all outputs and in some cases the performance indicators that were developed were not related to the NPAH's outcomes. The limitations of the NPAH performance framework have been examined in several government reviews as discussed in the following section.

COAG Reform Council—Early assessment of progress

3.6 In late 2009, COAG agreed and subsequently requested the COAG Reform Council to provide an early assessment of progress under the NPAH. The COAG Reform Council concluded in its report dated 9 July 2010, that the NPAH's performance reporting framework was 'by and large unworkable', and recommended a review to develop and implement a simplified

⁵⁴ Council of Australian Governments; *National Partnership Agreement on Homelessness*, Canberra, 2009, p. 5.

performance reporting framework.⁵⁵ As discussed later in paragraph 3.24, the COAG Reform Council has also highlighted the limitations of the framework in its reporting in relation to the National Affordable Housing Agreement (NAHA), the national agreement to which the NPAH contributes.

Heads of Treasuries—Review of National Agreements, National Partnerships and Implementation Plans under the Intergovernmental Agreement on Federal Financial Relations

3.7 The Heads of Treasuries' *Review of National Agreements, National Partnerships and Implementation Plans under the Intergovernmental Agreement on Federal Financial Relations* was completed in 2010. Concern was expressed in the review about the performance reporting framework, in particular the ability to access robust data to allow the governments to measure and report on progress. The review also recommended that the NPAH be redesigned and that the scheduled mid-term review be brought forward. In making this recommendation the review noted that:

Some of the required data on outcomes almost certainly cannot be collected, while the output/service delivery indicators do not adequately measure the quality of services to people facing homelessness.⁵⁶

Homelessness Working Group—Review of the National Partnership Agreement on Homelessness⁵⁷

3.8 The Review of the National Partnership on Homelessness undertaken by the Homelessness Working Group and completed in 2011–12 had the objective of:

- providing an assessment of the progress toward achievement of outcomes;
- addressing the performance reporting issues identified in the COAG Reform Council's review and the Heads of Treasuries' review; and
- reviewing the performance reporting framework.

⁵⁵ COAG Reform Council, *National Partnership Agreement on Homelessness: Early assessment of progress*, 9 July 2010, p. ii–iii.

⁵⁶ *Report of the Review of National Agreements, National Partnerships and Implementation Plans under the Intergovernmental Agreement on Federal Financial Relations—Heads of Treasuries*, 2011, p. 51.

The review was undertaken jointly by the Treasury and all state and territory treasury departments.

⁵⁷ The Homelessness Working Group is made up of representatives from each state and territory jurisdiction and representatives from the Australian Government, including FaHCSIA. It is a cross-jurisdictional committee that provides advice on strategic housing and homelessness issues.

3.9 The working group concluded that it was difficult to distinguish the impacts of the NPAH from those of other initiatives, and noted that there was no formal evaluative material available at the time of the review that would indicate that projects funded under the NPAH were reducing homelessness. The review recommended the introduction of a new performance framework, including performance measures and benchmarks for all of the performance indicators.

3.10 COAG agreed to a revised performance framework for the NPAH in April 2012. The amended performance framework for the NPAH is presented in Appendix 3. The changes to the performance framework address some of the earlier issues identified, for example, the inclusion of performance benchmarks for all performance indicators. However, the changes do not address the fact that progress against the outcomes of the NPAH cannot be measured over the life of the agreement. The data source for measuring progress against these outcomes is the censuses of population and housing. The last census was completed in 2011, and next census will not be undertaken until 2016. As a result, FaHCSIA will be unable to measure the level of homelessness at the benchmark date to 30 June 2013. Some data can be sourced from the Specialist Homelessness Services National Data Collection, which will assist with assessing progress against the other outcomes of the NPAH, but this information is only available from 2011–12, as discussed in more detail in paragraph 3.31.

3.11 In the design of any future funding arrangement there would be benefit in FaHCSIA considering its implementation experience to date and advising the Australian Government on options for developing a performance framework with a closer alignment between outcomes and performance indicators, so as to enable more effective monitoring and assessment of progress. Such an approach would also support an assessment of whether the reforms being sought by the Australian Government and the underlying approach to preventing, reducing and breaking the cycle of homelessness are effective strategies. In developing the performance framework, consideration should also be given to the availability of accessible, accurate, comparable and timely data which can be used in assessing and reporting nationally on the agreed outcomes.

Reporting by the state and territory governments

3.12 The state and territory governments are responsible for providing detailed annual reports to the Australian Government that outline progress against the NPAH implementation plan outputs, performance indicators and timelines. FaHCSIA issues guidance each year to the state and territory governments on the required form and content of the annual reports, although changes to requirements have generally been minimal over the life of the agreement. The guidance is issued following consultation with the responsible state and territory government agencies, endorsement of the reporting requirements by the Homelessness Working Group and approval by the Housing and Homelessness Policy Research Working Group. The annual reports submitted to FaHCSIA generally set out progress against the individual initiatives funded through the NPAH and whether the targets for the individual initiatives have been met.⁵⁸ Reports are due by the end of September each year, but the timeliness of submission of the reports by the state and territory governments has varied over the life of the agreement.

3.13 Overall, the annual reporting arrangements implemented are sufficiently comprehensive to provide FaHCSIA with an appropriate level of visibility over the delivery of individual initiatives and emerging issues. From a management perspective this assists in monitoring progress, identifying risks, and developing mitigation strategies where progress is slower than expected, or a state and/or territory is failing to achieve its output targets. However, the level of detail required to be reported through the annual reporting process is significant and the state and territory governments have raised concerns about the administrative workload that reporting in such detail creates. The focus on reporting activity at an initiative level also means that the reports do not provide an assessment of overall progress. Better aligning annual reporting requirements with the performance framework of the NPAH would be a useful first step in assisting key stakeholders to understand the progress achieved and the impact that the NPAH has had in respect of reducing and preventing homelessness.

3.14 For any subsequent funding arrangement in relation to homelessness, there is an opportunity for FaHCSIA to more comprehensively identify its information needs and place a greater emphasis on the collection of

⁵⁸ The Victorian Government reports at a performance indicator level, as agreed in their implementation plan.

information that is clearly linked to and supports an assessment of the agreed performance indicators and outcomes, in particular the impact of the funding arrangement on reducing and preventing homelessness. A further issue for consideration is the reliability of reported data and FaHCSIA's ability to verify or test the accuracy of information reported. In several of the audits undertaken by state and territory Auditors-General of the NPAH in their respective jurisdictions, the accuracy of reported information was raised. This was largely attributable to data collection limitations and definitional matters.

Annual review of the state and territory implementation plans

3.15 Each year, following the annual reporting process, the state and territory implementation plans are reviewed in line with the requirements of the NPAH. The NPAH suggests that FaHCSIA is required to update the implementation plans on behalf of the jurisdictions. However, a bilateral approach to the review of the implementation plans has been adopted as the state and territory jurisdictions are the drafters of the implementation plans and are ultimately responsible for the implementation of the initiatives outlined.

3.16 FaHCSIA has jointly reviewed the NPAH implementation plans on three occasions, during 2009–10, 2010–11 and 2011–12. The reviews provided an opportunity for FaHCSIA to obtain an understanding of progress against the implementation plans and to enter into discussions about whether a revision to the implementation plans is warranted.

3.17 Before undertaking the inaugural reviews of the implementation plans, FaHCSIA consulted with the Housing and Homelessness Policy Research Working Group, a cross-jurisdictional committee that provides advice on strategic housing and homelessness issues. The agreed approach, reflected in the bilateral reviews, emphasised focusing on understanding how implementation of the NPAH is working on the ground with key focus areas including: overall progress; governance mechanisms for issues resolution; progress against the financial year targets; allocated and projected expenditure; reform of the homelessness sector and mainstream services; and sustainability of these reforms.

3.18 To reflect actual progress and changes agreed to as part of the annual reviews of the state and territory jurisdiction implementation plans, the implementation plans for all jurisdictions, except for Victoria, have been

revised.⁵⁹ Some amendments, particularly following the first annual review, were significant with a number of the jurisdictions rebalancing the mix of homelessness services being delivered. Other changes included the re-phasing of performance targets to better reflect actual progress, and the reformatting of the plans to improve their consistency following the introduction of a standardised implementation plan template by the Australian Government.

3.19 The revision of the implementation plans was a lengthy process, taking in some cases in excess of 12 months to complete, however, it is an important step which assists the Australian Government to retain oversight and to influence implementation. Once agreed, implementation plans and/or revised implementation plans are made available from the Federal Financial Relations website, but this process has been delayed in some instances.⁶⁰

Financial reporting

3.20 Australian Government funding provided through the NPAH is required to be matched dollar for dollar by the state and territory governments, which were also required to maintain their base level of funding to homelessness services so that the additional funding was for 'new effort'. FaHCSIA has an overarching responsibility on behalf of the Australian Government to manage the NPAH. However, the current structure of the financial reporting requirements does not enable FaHCSIA to determine whether the funding provided by the Australian Government has been expended by the state and territory governments and/or whether the Australian Government's funding contribution is being matched.

3.21 The Intergovernmental Agreement on Federal Financial Relations requires the state and territory treasuries to report to the Standing Council on Federal Financial Relations,⁶¹ through the Treasury, about expenditure under national partnerships, but there is no agreement to provide co-contribution information to the Australian Government departments responsible for implementing national partnerships. Consequently, FaHCSIA is not able to confirm whether the state and territory governments are meeting the NPAH co-contribution requirements and the Minister has publicly observed that 'I

⁵⁹ Revision of the implementation plans is not mandatory and requires bilateral agreement.

⁶⁰ The NPAH and the state and territory implementation plans are available from <http://www.federalfinancialrelations.gov.au/content/national_partnership_agreements/housing.aspx> accessed on 15 October 2012.

⁶¹ The Standing Council on Federal Financial Relations is a COAG body which oversees the operation of the Intergovernmental Agreement on Federal Financial Relations. The Council is chaired by the Treasurer and includes the Treasurers of each state and territory or their designated representative.

don't receive sufficient information to know whether those other jurisdictions are adding to that spend [the Australian Government's investment through the NPAH].'⁶² This is a significant limitation of the accountability arrangements of the NPAH, and to address this issue, there would have been benefit in FaHCSIA providing early advice to the Minister on the limitations of the financial reporting arrangements and seeking to modify the agreement as part of the mid-term review undertaken in 2011. The NPAH was amended in 2012, but the amendments did not address the limitations of the agreement's supporting financial management framework.

Public reporting of progress

3.22 Reporting of program progress is both a requirement of the NPAH and a sound management practice that assists in meeting public accountability expectations. The Intergovernmental Agreement on Federal Financial Relations states that 'the reporting framework will focus on the achievement of results, efficient service delivery and timely provision of publicly available performance information.'⁶³ In respect of these requirements, information in relation to the NPAH is reported at three levels. This includes reporting by the COAG Reform Council, publication by FaHCSIA of the state and territory jurisdiction annual reports on its website, and the inclusion of reporting on the NPAH in FaHCSIA's annual reports to the Parliament.

Reporting by the COAG Reform Council

3.23 Under the Intergovernmental Agreement on Federal Financial Relations, the COAG Reform Council is responsible for reporting on the performance of the Australian, state and territory governments in respect of progress against the six national agreements and underlying national partnerships, where these support achievement of the objectives of a national agreement. The reports also include an assessment of progress against the performance benchmarks or targets outlined in the national partnerships.

3.24 The NPAH is one of the national partnership agreements that support the NAHA and has been included in COAG Reform Council reports about that agreement since 2010. However, the reported information has been largely limited to publicly available statistics and/or data pertaining to measurable

⁶² Patricia Karvelas, *The Australian, Action on homeless declining*, 6 November 2012.

⁶³ COAG Standing Council on Federal Financial Relations, *Intergovernmental Agreement on Federal Financial Relations, Schedule C*, 2008, p. C-1.

outputs, such as capital works. The COAG Reform Council has noted that it has not been able to provide comprehensive reports against the national partnerships which support the NAHA due to limitations in the available performance information. In its third report on the NAHA (2010–11), the COAG Reform Council explained that it decided not to report on the NPAH as it could not link the activity reported by the state and territory jurisdictions to the outcomes and objectives in the overarching national agreement; could not compare the results as the reported information is not clearly linked to the milestones or indicators contained in implementation plans; and there was generally an absence of the required information. The COAG Reform Council subsequently recommended that ‘activities under future National Partnerships covered by National Agreements clearly link to the objectives of [the] related National Agreement’.⁶⁴ COAG responded by agreeing in principle with this recommendation. As noted in paragraph 3.10, the NPAH performance framework was amended in 2012, in response to a mid-term review of the agreement, but the amendments do not adequately address issues identified by the COAG Reform Council.

Publication of state and territory annual reports

3.25 To fulfil its external reporting obligations, FaHCSIA works with the state and territory governments in preparing a public version of their annual reports, which are subsequently made available from FaHCSIA’s website. The provision of these reports meets the NPAH reporting requirements, but as the annual reports themselves, as discussed in paragraph 3.13, focus on the delivery of specific initiatives, their publication does not provide external stakeholders with a clear understanding of the progress being achieved against the NPAH national targets.

FaHCSIA’s departmental annual reports

3.26 FaHCSIA reports information about homelessness in its annual reports under Outcome 2: Housing—‘Access to affordable, safe housing through: payments and support services; and rental subsidies to low and moderate income households’.⁶⁵ The reporting of homelessness information primarily covers activity that is occurring in the homelessness sector. For example, in

⁶⁴ COAG Reform Council, *Affordable Housing 2010–11: Comparing performance across Australia*, Canberra, April 2012, p. xv.

⁶⁵ Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs; *2011-2012 Annual Report-Paving the Way*, Canberra, 2012, p. 55.

2011–12 FaHCSIA reported that about 170 000 support periods⁶⁶ were provided by homelessness agencies under the NPAH, and that, as at 31 March 2012, a total of 400 new dwellings had been constructed under ‘A Place to Call Home’.

3.27 FaHCSIA is not explicitly required to report publicly on overall progress of the NPAH or the implementation of associated reforms, however, providing a more accurate reflection of progress by reporting against the outcomes and performance indicators of the agreement at a national level would be beneficial in informing stakeholders. Eighteen months after implementation of the NPAH commenced, FaHCSIA published a report titled *Progress and Action Plan–For the Australian Government’s White Paper on Homelessness*. The report, while not specific to the NPAH, provided an overview of the specific efforts of the Australian Government to reduce homelessness. This report included a cross-government perspective on actions taken and provided the public with a visible and accountable record of actions undertaken and initiatives underway to address homelessness. The report included a summary of progress against the White Paper interim targets and provided an update on key initiatives outlined in the NPAH. FaHCSIA does not have plans to publish a further progress report on the White Paper, although this would be beneficial in informing stakeholders of progress.

Measuring progress under the NPAH

3.28 Homelessness is recognised as a complex problem that requires a long-term effort from all levels of government, associated agencies and service providers. A range of programs and services support homeless people or people at risk of homelessness, although many of these are not specifically targeted to the homeless. These factors combined with the diversity, spatial spread and complexity of the homeless population in Australia make it difficult to link outcomes achieved to specific interventions.

3.29 Data on homelessness in Australia is primarily drawn from two sources: Censuses of Population and Housing undertaken by the ABS and the Special Homelessness Services National Data Collection, collected by the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare. The Special Homelessness Services National Data Collection replaced the Supported Accommodation Assistance

⁶⁶ A support period relates to an occasion where a person has made contact with a homelessness service and received assistance. An individual may receive assistance on multiple occasions in any one year and/or may access the services of several homelessness service providers.

Program data collection, which was used until 2011. The census and special homelessness services data provide the most comprehensive and accurate data on homelessness in Australia and while these are good sources of information on the level of homelessness, there are constraints on their use to measure the success of the NPAH in reducing homelessness.

3.30 The ABS takes a 'point of prevalence' count of homeless people on a given night through the census. Measuring homelessness in this way provides a useful baseline, but has associated limitations. These include the stigma associated with self-reporting and the reluctance of homeless people to engage with government, and the ability to accurately measure episodic homelessness at intervals shorter than five years.

3.31 The Special Homelessness Services National Data Collection gathers information about all people who approach specialist homelessness services for assistance, and reports on 'annual prevalence', that is, the number of people accessing homelessness services over the course of a given year. This provides insight into patterns of homelessness. However, the Special Homelessness Services National Data Collection data does not include information on homeless people who are not in contact with specialist homelessness service providers, essentially people outside of the system. This data has only been collected since 2011 and is not directly comparable with data previously collected through the Specialist Homeless Services Program data collection.

3.32 As noted in paragraph 1.14, no official estimates of homelessness had been released until 2012, although data has been collected by the ABS for previous censuses. Based on its analysis of the two census data sets, the ABS estimated that the homeless population increased by 17 per cent to 105 237 between 2006 and 2011, as noted in Table 3.1. The NPAH's performance target of a 7 per cent reduction in homelessness by 2013 was set against a baseline of 104 676 people, which was an estimate of homelessness at the time the NPAH was agreed. The 2011 ABS estimates of homelessness show a slight increase over the 2006 estimates used in developing the NPAH, however, the ABS' 2006 estimates of homelessness are in fact much lower than previously estimated at 89 728 people, leading to the 17 per cent increase. During this period the rate of homelessness (the number of homeless people per 10 000 of the population) also increased but at a proportionally lower rate of 8 per cent.⁶⁷

⁶⁷ ABS estimates indicate that the rate of homeless increased from 45.2 people per 10 000 of the population in 2006 to 48.9 people per 10 000 of the population in 2011.

Table 3.1**Homeless population and rate of change between 2006 and 2011**

Jurisdiction	2006		2011		Number	Rate
	Number of peoples	Rate per 10 000 of the population	Number of peoples	Rate per 10 000 of the population	Change from 2006 to 2011	Change from 2006 to 2011
Australian Capital Territory	949	29.3	1785	50.0	88%	71%
New South Wales	22 219	33.9	28 190	40.8	27%	20%
Northern Territory	15 265	791.7	15 479	730.7	1%	-8%
Queensland	18 856	48.3	19 838	45.8	5%	-5%
South Australia	5607	37.0	5985	37.5	7%	1%
Tasmania	1145	24.0	1579	31.9	38%	33%
Victoria	17 410	35.3	22 789	42.6	31%	21%
Western Australia	8277	42.3	9592	42.8	16%	1%
Homeless people	89 728	45.2	105 237	48.9	17%	8%

Source: Australian Bureau of Statistics

3.33 The White Paper on homelessness foreshadowed a potential short-term increase in homelessness, which has occurred, but from the available data it is not possible to determine if this trend will continue. Homelessness service providers consulted by the ANAO indicated that the demand for their services is increasing, which is consistent with the ABS data. The COAG Reform Council's Report, *Affordable Housing 2010–11: Comparing performance across Australia*, published in April 2012, also indicated that housing and rental affordability is worsening, placing greater stress on low and middle income earners.

3.34 The ABS has noted that most of the increase in homelessness between 2006 and 2011 can be attributed to the number of people living in severely overcrowded dwellings, as shown in Table 3.2. The data also show that there were significant increases in the number of people living in supported accommodation and in the number of people having temporary lodgings.

Table 3.2**Homeless population by living arrangement 2006 and 2011**

Living arrangement	2006		2011		Number	Rate
	Number of people	Rate per 10 000 of the pop.	Number of people	Rate per 10 000 of the pop.	Change from 2006 to 2011	Change from 2006 to 2011
Persons who are in improvised dwellings tents or sleeping out	7247	3.7	6813	3.2	-6%	-14%
Persons in supported accommodation for the homeless	17 329	8.7	21 258	9.9	23%	14%
Persons staying temporarily with other households	17 663	8.9	17 369	8.1	-2%	-9%
Persons staying in boarding houses	15 460	7.8	17 721	8.2	15%	5%
Persons in other temporary lodging	500	0.3	686	0.3	37%	0%
Persons living in 'severely' crowded dwellings	31 531	15.9	41 390	19.2	31%	21%
Homeless people	89 728	45.2	105 237	48.9	17%	8%

Source: Australian Bureau of Statistics

3.35 One of the other key performance indicators in the NPAH is the rate of change in homelessness in the Indigenous population. As presented in Table 3.3, between 2006 and 2011 the increase in the Indigenous homeless population was 3 per cent. Although this is a more modest increase than the general homeless population, Indigenous people remain significantly overrepresented in the homeless population at a rate of around 1 in 20 Indigenous people compared to around 1 in 200 people for the population as a whole.

Table 3.3**Homeless population by Indigenous status**

Population groups	2006		2011		Number	Rate
	Number of people	Rate per 10 000 of the pop.	Number of people	Rate per 10 000 of the pop.	Change from 2006 to 2011	Change from 2006 to 2011
Indigenous homeless	25 950	570.6	26 744	487.9	3%	-14%
Total homeless	89 728	45.2	105 237	48.9	17%	8%

Source: Australian Bureau of Statistics

3.36 Insights into homelessness in Australia can also be drawn from the Special Homelessness Services National Data Collection. Using this data, the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare in its 2012 report, *Specialist Homelessness Services 2011–12*, noted that during 2011–12, 229 247 people, or the equivalent of around 1 in 100 Australians, made contact with a specialist homelessness service. Specialist homelessness services provide a range of services from general support and assistance to crisis accommodation. General support and assistance was the most frequently required service with around 77 per cent of clients seeking this type of support. Assistance with accommodation was also an area of high need. During the same period, over 7 million nights of accommodation were provided by specialist homelessness service providers. However, as the Special Homelessness Services National Data Collection only commenced in 2011, trend data is not yet available to support an accurate assessment of whether usage of different types of homelessness services is increasing or decreasing. The Productivity Commission's *Report on Government Services 2013* presents data from both the Special Homelessness Services National Data Collection and the former Supported Accommodation Assistance Program. The report goes some way to providing an insight to service delivery trends and service utilisation over time, although the data sets are not readily comparable.

3.37 Given the limitations around measuring progress of the NPAH, the Australian Government is not well positioned to provide assurance that its investment in homelessness is effective. Recent trends in the homelessness data indicate that despite governments' efforts to prevent and reduce homelessness, an ongoing and sustained effort will be required if homelessness is to be reduced to the levels envisaged in the NPAH and White Paper. The NPAH

was initially due to expire on 30 June 2013, but the Australian and state and territory governments agreed in March 2013 to enter into a one-year transitional partnership agreement for 2013–14, while negotiations continue on a new longer-term agreement.

Conclusion

3.38 Monitoring and reporting of government performance in achieving the objectives, outcomes and outputs of programs is an essential aspect of government service delivery and public accountability. The ongoing assessment of performance also assists with identifying and managing risks and informing service delivery reform. The NPAH includes a performance framework comprising an objective, outcomes, performance indicators, baselines and benchmark targets. This framework has been replicated in the state and territory implementation plans. However, there is limited alignment between the NPAH outcomes and performance indicators, and the state and territory governments' reports focus on the delivery of individual initiatives rather than overall progress. This inhibits FaHCSIA's ability to effectively assess and report nationally on the outcomes of the NPAH. A better alignment is critical to ascertain whether the reforms being sought by the Australian Government and the underlying approaches to preventing, reducing and breaking the cycle of homelessness are effective strategies.

3.39 The NPAH's performance reporting framework has been examined in several Australian Government or cross-jurisdictional reviews. The reviews have identified a range of limitations including the inability to clearly link the NPAH outputs and outcomes, and the inability to measure changes in homelessness over the life of the agreement. In addition, the COAG Reform Council noted in its reports about the National Affordable Housing Agreement and supporting national partnerships, that it has been unable to report on the NPAH due to limitations in the available performance information, and the inability to link activity reported by the state and territory governments to the outcomes and objectives of the national agreement. Changes were made to the performance framework in 2012 following the mid-term review of the agreement, but the changes were not sufficiently significant to address the original design limitations of the framework, or to better position FaHCSIA to measure overall progress and the impact of the NPAH.

3.40 In administering the NPAH on behalf of the Australian Government, FaHCSIA has led the annual reporting process through the development of reporting guidelines which have been agreed by cross-jurisdictional

governance bodies. These guidelines require the state and territory governments to report at an individual initiative level, and consequently the annual reports provide little real insight into whether the service delivery and reform outcomes of the NPAH are being achieved.

3.41 The NPAH does not make provision for state and territory financial information to be provided to FaHCSIA. Consequently, FaHCSIA is not able to substantiate whether the state and territory governments are meeting their co-contribution commitments as agreed through the NPAH. This information is reported to the Treasury for provision to the Standing Council on Federal Financial Relations, but the Treasury has not been authorised to release this information to administering departments, even where the departments have overall policy responsibility for the agreement. This limits the view that the departments with policy responsibility would normally be expected to have over the performance of the program. There would be benefit, from the Australian Government perspective, in reviewing this approach.

3.42 Recent trends, as evidenced through changes between the 2006 and 2011 Censuses of Population and Housing, indicate that homelessness has increased. The NPAH's performance target of a 7 per cent reduction in homelessness by 2013 was set against a baseline of 104 676 people, which was an estimate of homelessness in Australia at the time the NPAH was agreed.⁶⁸ The 2011 census estimated that the homeless population had reached 105 237 people, which is a slight increase over the 2006 estimates used in developing the NPAH. However, the ABS has also estimated that in 2006 the homeless population was in fact much lower than previously estimated, at 89 728 people. As a result, there has been an increase of 17 per cent in the number of homeless people since 2006, on the basis of the census data that is now available. During this period the rate of homelessness (the number of homeless people per 10 000 of the population) also increased but at a proportionally lower rate of 8 per cent.⁶⁹

3.43 Based on ABS estimates, the number of Indigenous people who were homeless rose by around 3 per cent between 2006 and 2011 against the NPAH

⁶⁸ The NPAH was based on estimates of homelessness in Australia reflected in the publication *Counting the Homeless 2006*. *Counting the Homeless 2006* while released by the ABS and based on the 2006 Census of Population and Housing and other data sources was not an official count of homelessness in Australia. The ABS released official estimates of homelessness in Australia based on the 2001, 2006 and 2011 censuses during 2012.

⁶⁹ ABS estimates indicate that the rate of homeless increased from 45.2 people per 10 000 of the population in 2006 to 48.9 people per 10 000 of the population in 2011.

benchmark target of a reduction of 33 per cent.⁷⁰ Census data also shows that Indigenous people are significantly overrepresented in the homeless population at a rate of around 1 in 20 Indigenous people compared to around 1 in 200 people for the population of a whole.

3.44 The other key benchmark target of the NPAH relates to reducing the number of homeless people sleeping rough by 25 per cent. Although still short of expectations, progress against this target has been more positive with around a 6 per cent reduction in the number of homeless people sleeping rough, according to ABS estimates.⁷¹

3.45 To achieve its overall goal of halving homelessness by 2020, the Australian Government recognised that a long term commitment would be required and that the funding provided through the NPAH was a 'down payment'. In support of this, there would be benefit during 2013–14 in FaHCSIA evaluating the outcomes achieved under the NPAH to provide insight into how well the agreement is assisting the Australian, state and territory government in meeting the homelessness targets set by COAG. This information could be used to inform the negotiation of any longer-term funding arrangement for homelessness.

3.46 The NPAH was one of the early national partnerships to be agreed and its implementation has highlighted a number of policy and implementation issues. In support of the negotiation of future funding arrangements for homelessness, there would be benefit in FaHCSIA providing advice to the Australian Government, for its consideration, on key aspects of the design of potential funding arrangements, including: aligning the funding arrangements to the availability of the key data through which performance will be assessed; designing the performance framework in such a way that it supports assessment of service delivery reform and program outcomes; creating a payment structure that relates payments more closely to the achievement of agreed levels of performance; and finally, requiring the state and territory governments to provide financial information to the responsible policy department, particularly where a co-contribution requirement is included.

⁷⁰ The ABS has estimated that the number of Indigenous homeless people increased from 25 950 people in 2006 to 26 744 people in 2011. This data is not comparable with data drawn from the *Counting the Homeless 2006*, as at that time the Indigenous homeless population was estimated to be around 9500 people.

⁷¹ The ABS has estimated that 7200 homeless people were sleeping rough in 2006, which decreased to around 6800 homeless people in 2011. In *Counting the Homeless 2006*, it was estimated that around 16 300 homeless people were sleeping rough.

These issues are also matters which may require broader consideration by the Australian Government in respect of other future funding arrangements that operate at a national level.

Recommendation No.1

3.47 To better support the administration of any future funding arrangements for homelessness which involve the delivery of services by the state and territory governments, the ANAO recommends that FaHCSIA explore relevant options and provide advice to the Australian Government in respect of:

- (a) aligning the performance framework and key measures with timely, accessible and comparable data to support the monitoring of progress, including implementation of the reform agenda and the impact of the initiatives funded through the NPAH;
- (b) creating a payment structure that relates payments more closely to the achievement of agreed levels of performance, as is the case in some other national partnership agreements;
- (c) the state and territory governments providing financial data to the department to confirm their financial commitments under the funding arrangement are being met; and
- (d) the effectiveness of the existing approaches to addressing homelessness, following an evaluation of the overall impact of the NPAH and the impact of selected key initiatives.

FaHCSIA's response:

3.48 *Agreed. FaHCSIA notes the findings of the report and accepts the Recommendation. FaHCSIA particularly notes that changes to the payment structure and performance framework of any longer term homelessness Agreement would allow for improved transparency and accountability of how the Agreement contributes to meeting the ambitious Homelessness White Paper targets. FaHCSIA is considering ways of applying the recommendations of this report and lessons learned to any longer term homelessness Agreement, while also following the guidelines stipulated as part of the Intergovernmental Agreement on Federal Financial Relations.*

4. Overview of the Concurrent Audit Reports

This chapter presents an overview of the key findings from the concurrent reports of the state and territory Auditors-General on the implementation of the NPAH in their respective jurisdictions.

Introduction

4.1 National partnership agreements were introduced in 2009 as part of the reform of the federal financial relations framework. These agreements are a funding mechanism designed to provide the state and territory governments with flexibility in service delivery while, at the same time, assisting the Australian Government to achieve mutually agreed policy outcomes and reform in areas of national importance. National partnership agreements are to be supported by robust performance monitoring and reporting arrangements that provide sufficient information to meet public accountability requirements, including whether the desired outcomes and outputs of the agreement are being achieved, and whether service delivery has been enhanced.⁷²

4.2 As discussed in paragraph 1.17, the Australian Council of Auditors-General agreed to increase collaboration, where appropriate, in the conduct of performance audits on topics that have a national dimension. In support of this approach six state and territory Auditors-General and the Auditor-General for Australia agreed to undertake a concurrent audit of the NPAH. A common audit objective and criteria were developed to support and guide the concurrent audit approach. The objective of the state and territory audits was to examine whether or not the relevant government agencies were meeting their obligations under the NPAH, and whether or not the NPAH was making a difference for homeless people.

4.3 As at 16 April 2013, the Western Australian, Victorian, Queensland, Tasmania and Northern Territory Auditors-General had tabled, in their respective parliaments, reports on implementation of the NPAH in their

⁷² COAG Standing Council on Federal Financial Relations, *Federal Financial Relations Circular No. 2009/03—Accountabilities Under the New Federal Financial Relations Framework*, 3 April 2009.

jurisdictions.⁷³ The ANAO has examined the audit reports tabled to date and identified several issues that can help inform a broader understanding of the implementation on the NPAH. These matters are presented in two parts in this chapter. Firstly, broader thematic issues which have been discussed in two or more of the audit reports, and secondly, issues which have been identified as largely being specific to the implementation of the NPAH in a particular state and territory.

Thematic issues identified in the reports of the state and territory Auditors-General

4.4 The reports prepared by the Auditors-General identified several thematic issues which are relevant to an overall consideration of the implementation of the NPAH. One of the common issues was that despite the implementation of a range of homelessness initiatives, the expected reduction in homelessness will not be achieved in any of the jurisdictions. This was coupled with a reported lack of focus on measuring the outcomes or effectiveness of the funded initiatives in reducing homelessness in each jurisdiction. Measuring and reporting on activity or outputs, provides information about what services are being delivered, but this approach to reporting does not provide an insight into the quality, timeliness or longer-term impact of the services.

4.5 In addition, the Auditors-General identified in respect of performance reporting, that the lack of consistent evaluation of the funded initiatives means that where outcomes are being achieved, it is not always possible to attribute and/or isolate the impact to a specific intervention. Outcomes under the NPAH, whether positive or negative, may be the result of interaction with a number of programs or broader circumstance, for example, the availability of

⁷³ Office of the Auditor-General for Western Australia—*Implementation of the National Partnership Agreement on Homelessness in Western Australia (13/2012)*, tabled 24 October 2012 and available at: http://www.audit.wa.gov.au/reports/pdfreports/report2012_13.pdf

Victorian Auditor-General's Office—*Addressing Homelessness: Partnerships and Plans*, tabled 6 February 2013, and available at: <http://www.audit.vic.gov.au/publications/20130206-Homelessness/20130206-Homelessness.html>

Queensland Audit Office—*Implementing the National Partnership Agreement on Homelessness in Queensland*, tabled 12 February 2013, and available at: <http://www.qao.qld.gov.au/files/file/RTP6for2012-13NPAHomelessnessWebPDF.pdf>

Tasmanian Audit Office—*Report of the Auditor-General, No. 8 of 2012-13, National Partnership Agreement on Homelessness*, tabled 19 March 2013, and available at: <http://www.audit.tas.gov.au/publications/reports/specialreport/pdfs/2012-13-8.pdf>.

Auditor-General for the Northern Territory—*March 2013. Report to the Legislative Assembly*, tabled 27 March 2013, and available at: <http://www.nt.gov.au/ago/reports/2013%20March.pdf>.

affordable housing, natural disasters and rates of unemployment. It was also noted in the reports that while the NPAH reporting requirements were being met, reporting to the state Parliaments had been inadequate limiting the level of accountability being provided to the community. The quality of the information reported has also been raised as the veracity of the reported information could not be established in all instances. National partnerships agreements were premised on clarifying the responsibilities of the states and territories in respect of service delivery, with this approach being coupled with enhanced accountability to the community through the timely provision of performance information about those services.

4.6 The NPAH was designed to promote reform of the homelessness service delivery system with the aim of developing better connected and more integrated services. The Auditors-General have observed that in some states the additional funding under the NPAH has been used to fund business as usual activities, while in other jurisdictions it was found that there was a greater focus given to reform of the homelessness service delivery system, which improved the level of interaction between services. To sustain changes in the homelessness service delivery system and future service delivery, the need for greater certainty of future funding was also discussed.

Summary of jurisdictional specific matters identified in the concurrent audits of the implementation of the NPAH

4.7 The reports prepared by the Western Australian, Victorian, Queensland, Tasmanian and Northern Territory Auditors-General have identified a number of issues which have influenced the effectiveness of the implementation of the NPAH in their jurisdictions. Jurisdictional issues identified by the state and territory Auditors-General include:

- In Western Australia around half of the funding provided under the NPAH was allocated to capital projects, essentially the purchase and/or construction of houses and housing units. This approach was complemented by other programs designed to assist people maintain their public housing tenancies or private rentals. However, in some areas where these supporting programs were established, the report noted that there was a lack of affordable housing and considered this to highlight issues in program design and planning.
- The Western Australian Auditor-General's report also highlighted the need for a longer lead time when implementing significant programs

such as the NPAH. It was noted in the report that the six month timeframe for developing the implementation plan and commencing the funded initiatives was overly ambitious, with most of the initiatives not beginning for a further six to 12 months after the implementation plan was agreed.

- The implementation of the NPAH in Victoria was found by the Auditor-General to not have been supported by good governance arrangements. Several state departments were given a role in implementing the NPAH in Victoria but no single department was accountable for performance or compliance with the NPAH. The Victorian Auditor-General concluded that where multiple departments have varying roles and responsibilities, a clear and coordinated approach to governance is particularly important.
- Amendments to the state and territory implementation plans were to be negotiated and agreed with the Australian Government. Despite this, the Victorian Auditor-General found that the Department of Human Services significantly varied its commitments under the NPAH implementation plan without seeking agreement of the Australian Government.
- The Queensland Auditor-General's report discussed the contract management arrangements between the responsible state department and service providers. In the report it was noted that while the contracts reviewed specify the services to be delivered and contain performance measures and targets, the responsible state department could not monitor the effectiveness or efficiency of service delivery arrangements as the service providers report on activity and the cost of services, but not the quality or timeliness of services.
- The Tasmanian Auditor-General's report identified that the Tasmanian implementation plan for the NPAH, while addressing the core outputs of the agreement, did not adequately address performance measurement, risk management or cover all of the agreements outputs. The report also identified that while the initiatives examined have made a difference for homeless people, there would be benefit in a longitudinal study being undertaken at a later stage to support an understanding of the longer-term outcomes of the funded programs.
- Homelessness services in the Northern Territory are substantially delivered through non-government organisations. The Northern

Territory Auditor-General's report identified the need for realistic timeframes for program implementation, particularly where non-government organisations are involved, as time is required to engage service providers, and subsequently for the service to engage staff and establish governance frameworks. The Auditor-General also noted that it was not possible to determine, definitively, whether the NPAH initiatives had made a difference for homeless people due to data constraints.

4.8 National partnership agreements are premised on effective service delivery by the state and territory governments and the state and territory audit reports have indicated, to varying degrees, that there are opportunities to improve service delivery, including in the areas of co-ordination, evaluation and reporting. Factors affecting the performance of the state and territory governments in delivering services are important aspects for the Australian Government to consider in future similar arrangements.

Ian McPhee
Auditor-General

Canberra ACT
2 May 2013

Appendix 1: Agency response



Australian Government

Department of Families, Housing,
Community Services and Indigenous Affairs

Finn Pratt PSM
Secretary

Dr Andrew Pope
Group Executive Director
Performance Audit Services Group
GPO Box 707
Canberra ACT 2601

Dear Dr Pope

Thank you for your letter of 7 March 2013 and the opportunity to respond to the proposed audit report on the *Implementation of the National Partnership Agreement on Homelessness*.

The Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs (FaHCSIA) notes the findings of the report and accepts Recommendation number one.

The parameters of the 2013-14 Transitional NPAH, which will commence immediately following the expiry of the current Agreement on 30 June 2013, were settled by the government prior to the ANAO audit being made available. Any longer-term homelessness Agreement will take into account the recommendation and findings of this report.

FaHCSIA agrees that aligning the performance framework and key measures with timely, accessible and comparable data would support the monitoring of progress under the NPAH and improve understanding of the best methods to address homelessness. However, as recognised in the report, FaHCSIA notes that addressing and measuring homelessness can be complex.

The Department is working with the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare to explore the option of utilising data from the Specialist Homelessness Services National Data Collection (SHSC) to inform future homelessness funding and reform direction. The SHSC may be useful in supplementing census data and improving overall understanding of the contribution of National Partnership Agreements in meeting the ambitious homelessness White Paper targets.

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FaHCSIA agrees that creating a payment structure that more closely links payments to the achievement of agreed performance milestones would facilitate managing the progress of states and territories under the National Partnership Agreement on Homelessness and any funding mechanisms for future National Partnership Agreements on Homelessness. As part of any longer-term homelessness Agreement, FaHCSIA is considering ways to more closely align payments with agreed performance milestones.

FaHCSIA agrees that increased financial reporting would be beneficial in providing an accurate and holistic understanding of the actions taken by states and territories in tackling homelessness under the National Partnership Agreement on Homelessness. This would have the added benefit of increasing overall accountability and transparency of progress under the Agreement. As acknowledged in the report, FaHCSIA has generally fulfilled its responsibilities under the NPAH consistent with the expectations outlined in the Intergovernmental Agreement on Federal Financial Relations.

FaHCSIA will take into account lessons learned as a part of the implementation of the current NPAH, and through ANAO's evaluation of the Agreement in the development and implementation of any future National Partnership Agreements to address homelessness within Australia.

Should you wish to discuss this matter further, please contact Mr Bryan Palmer, Group Manager, Housing and Homelessness on (02) 6146 0040.

Yours sincerely



Finn Pratt

15 April 2013

Appendix 2: Extract from the National Partnership Agreement on Homelessness—outputs

Outputs of the National Partnership Agreement on Homelessness

Core outputs:

- Implementation of the *A Place to Call Home* initiative.
- Street-to-home initiatives for chronic homeless people (rough sleepers).
- Support for private and public tenants to help sustain their tenancies, including through tenancy support, advocacy, case management, financial counselling and referral services.
- Assistance for people leaving child protection services, correctional and health facilities, to access and maintain stable, affordable housing.

Additional outputs:

- Support services and accommodation to assist older people who are homeless or at risk of homelessness.
- Services to assist homeless people with substance abuse to secure or maintain stable accommodation.
- Services to assist homeless people with mental health issues to secure or maintain stable accommodation.
- Support to assist young people aged 12 to 18 years who are homeless or at risk of homelessness to re-engage with their family where it is safe to do so, maintain sustainable accommodation and engagement with school and employment.
- Improvements in service coordination and provision.
- Support for women and children experiencing domestic and family violence to stay in their present housing where it is safe to do so.
- Assistance for homeless people, including families with children, to stabilise their situation and to achieve sustainable housing.
- Outreach programs to connect rough sleepers to long-term housing and health services.
- National, state and rural (including remote) homelessness action plans to assist homeless people in areas identified as having high rates of homelessness.

- Support for children who are homeless or at risk of homelessness including to maintain contact with the education system.
- Legal services provided to people who are homeless or at risk of homelessness as a result of legal issues including family violence, tenancy or debt.
- Workforce development and career progression for workers in homelessness services.

Appendix 3: Changes to NPAH performance reporting framework 2009 to 2012

Presented in the following table are the performance indicators and benchmarks detailed in the NPAH as agreed by COAG in 2009 and amendments agreed in 2012.

Performance indicators-2009	Performance benchmarks-2009	Performance indicators-2012	Performance benchmarks-2012
Proportion of Australians who are homeless	By 2013, a decrease of 7 per cent the number in Australians who are homeless to less than 97 350 people	Proportion of Australians who are homeless	<i>7 per cent reduction in the number of homeless Australians by 2013</i>
Not applicable	By 2013, a decrease of a third to 6730 Indigenous Australians who are homeless	<i>Proportion of Indigenous Australians who are homeless</i>	<i>33.3 per cent reduction in the number of Indigenous homeless Australians by 2013</i>
Proportion of Australians who are experiencing primary homelessness (rough sleeping)	A decrease by 25 per cent in the number of Australians sleeping rough to less than 12 300 people or equivalent measure of six homeless people sleeping rough per 10 000 population	Proportion of Australians who are experiencing primary homelessness (rough sleeping)	<i>25 per cent reduction in the number of rough sleepers by 2013</i>
Not applicable	Not applicable	<i>Proportion of Indigenous Australians who are experiencing primary homelessness (rough sleeping)</i>	<i>Preferred direction: decrease</i>
The number of families who maintain or secure safe and sustainable housing following family violence	To be developed and agreed prior to finalisation of the Implementation Plans	<i>Proportion of families who maintain or secure and safe sustainable housing following family violence</i>	<i>Preferred direction: increase</i>
Increase in the number of people exiting care and custodial settings into secure and affordable housing	The number of people released from such institutions into homelessness is reduced by 25 per cent (3,552) by 2013	<i>Proportion of people exiting care and custodial settings into secure and affordable housing</i>	<i>Preferred direction: increase</i>

Performance indicators-2009	Performance benchmarks-2009	Performance indicators-2012	Performance benchmarks-2012
Reduce the number of people exiting social housing and private rental into homelessness	The number of people exiting from social housing and private rental to homelessness is reduced by less than 25 per cent (3 027) by 2013	<i>Proportion of people in social housing and private rental who are supported to maintain or secure sustainable housing</i>	<i>Preferred direction: increase</i>
The proportion of people experiencing repeat periods of homelessness	25 per cent reduction (13,700) in three repeat periods of homelessness at an emergency service in 12 months	Proportion of people experiencing repeat periods of homelessness	<i>25 per cent reduction in the number of people experiencing three repeat periods of homelessness at an emergency service in 12 months by 2013</i>
Number of young people (12 to 18 years) who are homeless or at risk of homelessness who are re-engaged with family, school and work	To be developed and agreed prior to finalisation of the Implementation Plans	<i>Proportion of young people (12 to 18 years) who are homeless or at risk of homelessness who are re-engaged with family, school or work</i>	<i>Preferred direction: increase</i>
Number of children (under 12 years) who are homeless or at risk of homelessness who are provided with additional support to maintain contact with their school.	To be developed and agreed prior to finalisation of the Implementation Plans	<i>Not applicable</i>	<i>Not applicable</i>
Number of families who are homeless or at risk of homelessness who receive financial advice, counselling and/or case management.	To be developed and agreed prior to finalisation of the Implementation Plans	<i>Proportion of families who are homeless or at risk of homelessness who receive case management</i>	<i>Preferred direction: increase</i>

Performance indicators-2009	Performance benchmarks-2009	Performance indicators-2012	Performance benchmarks-2012
Number of people who are homeless or at risk who are provided with legal services	To be developed and agreed prior to finalisation of the Implementation Plans	<i>Not applicable</i>	<i>Not applicable</i>
Number of staff of specialist homeless services provided with formal training and development opportunities	To be developed and agreed prior to finalisation of the Implementation Plans	<i>Not applicable</i>	<i>Not applicable</i>

Appendix 4: Projects being delivered under the NPAH research partnership agreements

Organisation	Project
University of Queensland	Examination of Street to Home and Way2Home rough sleeping interventions in Brisbane, Sydney and Newcastle.
University of Queensland	Developing effective service responses to homeless and public place dwelling for Indigenous people.
University of Queensland	Housing support options for older people who are homeless.
University of Queensland	Effective inter-organisational and service integration in response to homelessness involving mainstream organisations.
University of Queensland	Developing an effective homelessness workforce.
Flinders University	Role of Street to Home programs in Adelaide, Perth and Darwin.
Flinders University	Instability in the circumstance on newly arrived humanitarian entrants.
Flinders University	Can the homeless apply for work?
Flinders University	Mapping and Reviewing homelessness programs.
Flinders University	Housing (in)stability during apprenticeship.
Flinders University	The role of Local Government in addressing homelessness.
Flinders University	Working to 'turn off the tap': the role of frontline services in addressing homelessness
Flinders University	Beyond charity: the engagement of the philanthropic and homelessness sectors in Australia.
Flinders University	Risk factors in homelessness programs and interventions.
Swinburne University	Role of Street to Home programs in Melbourne, Canberra and Hobart.
Swinburne University	A review of early intervention strategies to reduce the need for women and children to make repeated use of refuge and other crisis accommodation.
Swinburne University	The Geelong study: Early intervention for at-risk young people
Swinburne University	On the margins: Semi-permanent and permanent caravan park dwellers (Stage 2).
Swinburne University	The practice of outreach and its role in responding to primary homelessness.
Swinburne University	Is there a tipping point at which additional services for homeless people do not lead to additional improvements in health and wellbeing? A study of the STAY service in Tasmania.
Swinburne University	Which neighbourhoods have the highest risk of homelessness?
Swinburne University	Financial analysis of foyer-like youth housing models.
Swinburne University	What happens when young people leave state care?
Swinburne University	Workforce Training for the homelessness sector.

Appendix 5: National Homelessness Research Projects

Organisation	Project
Australian Catholic University – School of Business	Homelessness and unemployment: understanding the connection and breaking the cycle.
Australian Catholic University – Institute of Child Protection Studies	Responding to homelessness: the needs of sole-fathers and their children who experience homelessness.
Australian Institute of Family Studies	The influence of unstable housing on children's wellbeing and development from birth to 9 years of age: evidence from a national longitudinal study.
Bachelor Institute of Indigenous Tertiary Education	Indigenous women and the role of transactional sex in homelessness
Eastern Access Community Health Inc.	Understanding homelessness service transitions between community & clinical sectors (homelessness service transitions).
Flinders Partners Pty Ltd	Addressing homelessness amongst persons with a disability: identifying and enacting best practice.
Griffith University	Precarious social inclusion: chronic homelessness and impaired decision-making capacity.
HomeGround Services	What makes a difference? Building a foundation for nationally consistent homelessness client outcome measures.
Melbourne General Practice Network	Exploring the clinical care needs of homeless people within Melbourne's CBD and inner suburbs.
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