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Ex-Prisoners, SAAP, Housing and Homelessness  
in Australia

Final Report to the National SAAP Coordination  
and Development Committee

**Australian Institute of Criminology**

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**May 2004**

Ex-Prisoners, SAAP, Housing and Homelessness in Australia

Australian Institute of Criminology

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#### SAAP IV NATIONAL RESEARCH PROGRAM

During 2002-03, the National SAAP Coordination and Development Committee (CAD) agreed to fund a series of research projects to address a number of gaps in homelessness and SAAP policy and practice.

The projects were developed under four broad themes:

- Needs of Homeless Sub-Populations
- Service System Responses and Linkages
- Program Management and Administration
- Pathways and Costs of Homelessness.

The progressive findings from the research projects were, initially, used to inform the SAAP IV National Evaluation.

This report is the product of one of the research projects undertaken.

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## Acknowledgments

The Australian Institute of Criminology would like to thank the SAAP agency providers and the clients who participated in this research. Without their valuable contributions and willingness to discuss their experiences parts of this report would not have been possible.

Thanks are also extended to Ara Cresswell from the Australian Federation of Homelessness Organisations for assistance with publicising the aims of the research amongst SAAP agency providers, and to Rod McDonald from the Australian Government Department of Family and Community Services for valuable comments on parts of this report.

The author would also like to thank Maria Borzycki, Natalie Taylor and other colleagues at the AIC for feedback, assistance and support in the preparation of this report.

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## Executive summary

Homelessness is a significant social problem, with more than 105,000 Australian individuals estimated to be homeless. This is likely to be an underestimate of the total number of people experiencing homelessness at some time during their lives.

While the notion of homelessness carries with it certain stereotypes, they do not hold true under closer examination. The homeless population is diverse and may enter into homelessness through various pathways.

It has been estimated that more than 43,000 people leave adult prisons and re-enter the mainstream community each year, a number that is increasing. It is difficult to determine what proportion of these ex-prisoners is likely to experience homelessness and more accurate data is needed to better inform this question. Given that a large proportion of people leave prison without accommodation arranged or a clear idea how they will find accommodation, the problem of post-release accommodation may be a serious one.

There is a range of social disadvantages that characterise the homeless population. Disadvantages such as mental illness, substance misuse, poor physical health, Aboriginality, unemployment, poverty and family breakdown have been shown to contribute to homelessness.

The same social disadvantages that mark the homeless population are highly prevalent in the prisoner and ex-prisoner populations. For ex-prisoners, these disadvantages are compounded by a range of other disadvantages and difficulties that add to the challenge of finding appropriate, stable and secure accommodation after release.

Strong links have been found between homelessness and offending, with the experience of homelessness contributing to an increased likelihood of being imprisoned. For ex-prisoners, homelessness can increase already-present risks of re-offending and re-incarceration. Re-offending creates costs for the community at many levels and there are substantial economic and societal benefits to be gained from reducing both homelessness and re-offending amongst ex-prisoners.

The problem of homelessness, both generally and among ex-prisoners has prompted policy development in various countries. This policy development has tended to emphasise the need to target social disadvantages and social exclusion through the establishment of collaborative working relationships between different government agencies, and between government and community agencies. The importance of collaborative partnerships is also emphasised very strongly in Australian policy development at both the national and state/territory levels. All Australian jurisdictions are developing policies to address homelessness, with some promising initiatives being put in place to specifically assist ex-prisoners.

Together with the material gleaned from the literature, developments in post-release homelessness policy in Australian jurisdictions and elsewhere in the world yield a number of indicators of what may be involved in best practice policy in this field.

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Following on from the literature and policy review part of this project, independent research was conducted into homelessness in Australia, as viewed by staff of SAAP-funded agencies and their ex-prisoner clients. This study sought to establish a greater understanding of homelessness and accommodation issues for ex-prisoners and their use of SAAP funded services. The study also sought to examine the pathways into homelessness and into use of SAAP services and identify the impacts of ex-prisoner clients on SAAP funded services assisting them. Through interviews with both staff and clients of the agencies, the study sought to identify gaps in service provision for ex-prisoners facing homelessness.

Six SAAP-funded agencies providing services to ex-prisoner clients volunteered to assist with this project. These agencies represented one cross-section of the more diverse group of SAAP-funded agencies. Qualitative interviews were conducted with 18 staff members representing five of the agencies. Qualitative interviews were also conducted with 41 ex-prisoner clients of the six agencies, with the assistance and facilitation of the participating agencies. Interviews were conducted on-site, in five states.

Staff identified a range of challenges in providing services to ex-prisoner clients. Some of these were specific to the client group and some more generally related to providing services in the accommodation sector. The availability of public housing and affordable private housing emerged as a significant issue for many agencies. Having more accommodation options available was seen as important in providing flexibility to meet individual client needs and to allow flexibility in modes of service delivery.

Agency staff saw providing services to ex-prisoners as raising a number of specific challenges, both for the agencies and the clients. Staff saw that many clients faced stigmatisation and discrimination, leading to denial of access to private rental accommodation. This made it harder for agencies to assist clients into stable accommodation. For clients, it created self-esteem problems and made it harder to work on successfully returning to the community.

Problems arising from institutionalisation created challenges for staff, beyond those encountered with other clients in the homelessness sector. Ex-prisoners must make a broad range of changes to adjust to living in the community and may need to learn many basic living skills. For many clients, the problems of institutionalisation were seen to lead directly into returning to previous associations and behaviours, possibly leading to re-offending and a return to imprisonment.

It emerged from the study that prisoners released unconditionally without parole or other supervision may have less prospect of successfully returning to the community than those released under supervision conditions. Prisoners released from remand or at the end of a sentence without a parole period were more likely to have to try and get by without support or guidance. Many prisoners found this too difficult and a lack of supervision and support was seen by both staff and clients to directly relate to levels of re-offending.

Staff did not see providing services to ex-prisoner clients as having any significant impacts on their operations or their capacity to provide services to other client groups.

This was likely due in large part though, to the nature of the services participating in this study, some of which catered solely to ex-prisoners.

Both staff and clients saw levels of assistance and information available within the prison system to be a problem. In some cases this was due to a perception or understanding that there was little in the way of programs, advice, information or support available to prisoners, especially those in remand or serving short sentences. In other cases this was believed to be due to prisoners not making the necessary efforts to secure the forms of assistance and information that are available.

Interviews with ex-prisoner clients supported staff views in many respects. Clients released from prison under supervision conditions were found to be far more likely to be living in stable accommodation than those released unconditionally.

Clients living in stable accommodation, especially with ongoing support, at the time of interview were found to have more positive and well-founded expectations about their future accommodation than clients in less stable and less supported situations.

Clients living in stable accommodation at the time of interview were generally in this situation as a direct result of the work of their supporting agency. Clients who were able to leave prison directly into supported accommodation, particularly where this had been arranged before release, were more likely to be in stable accommodation than others who did not have such arrangements in place.

Information from clients suggested a complex and multi-faceted relationship between accommodation instability, offending and illicit drug use. Within this relationship, improvements in accommodation stability were likely to contribute to decreases in offending and drug use. Many clients indicated that at least some of their offending was due to not having stable accommodation.

The use of SAAP-funded and other services by clients in this survey was directly related to the type of support they were receiving and the nature of their supporting agency. A large proportion of clients were receiving all the support they needed from one of the participating agencies and had no need for other services. Clients not receiving this type of support were more likely to use a range of services to meet specific short-term needs and tended not to establish any kind of ongoing relationship with particular agencies.

Clients' perceptions of gaps in service closely reflected those expressed by staff, with a lack of affordable accommodation and more accommodation options being major concerns. Clients also saw more peer-based support as being helpful to ex-prisoners together with financial management assistance and general support.

For a number of clients in this survey, their lack of stable ongoing and independent accommodation was contributing to them being unable to have access to their children or be able to establish meaningful relationships with them. The interaction of accommodation issues with offending and other behaviours, including illicit drug use, was seen to be complex. Changes to accommodation situations though are likely to improve family relationships for at least some ex-prisoner clients.



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Drawing on the results of the literature and policy review, and the results of interviews with staff and ex-prisoner clients, a number of broad thematic conclusions have been made. The report concludes that ex-prisoners experience compounding levels of social disadvantage that leave them particularly vulnerable to homelessness. These disadvantages, coupled with those derived from the experience of imprisonment, lead to ex-prisoners having a particular set of needs in relation to post-release accommodation and may require special interventions to meet those needs. Given good and appropriate support, post-release outcomes, including in relation to accommodation, can be substantially improved.

The division of government responsibilities in relation to post-release homelessness is problematic and any interventions for ex-prisoners will require collaborative relationships with state and territory correctional services. Interventions to address post-release homelessness must begin at the time a prisoner is received into the correctional system and need to involve greater access for support services to work with prisoners before release.

While a good deal is now known about homelessness for ex-prisoners, there are still a number of areas where further research and examination is warranted. Some suggestions are made for future research directions as well as some recommendations for how the SAAP program can begin to address aspects of ex-prisoner homelessness.



## Part one: literature and policy review

### **Abbreviations used in this report**

ABS	Australian Bureau of Statistics
AFHO	Australian Federation of Homelessness Organisations
AHURI	Australian Housing & Urban Research Institute
AIHW	Australian Institute of Health & Welfare
AOD	Alcohol and other drug
CACH	Commonwealth Advisory Committee on Homelessness
CSHA	Commonwealth State Housing Agreement
JPET	Job Placement, Employment & Training
NACRO	National Association for the Care & Resettlement of Offenders (United Kingdom)
NDC	National Data Collection
NHS	National Homelessness Strategy
SAAP	Supported Accommodation Assistance Program
SCRSCSSP	Steering Committee for the Review of Commonwealth/State Service Provision



# 1. Introduction

Homelessness is a social problem of significant proportions in the Australian community. It has been estimated that on census night 1996, over 105,000 individuals in Australia were homeless (Chamberlain 1999).<sup>1</sup> The actual extent of homelessness in Australia is difficult to determine accurately as defining exactly what constitutes homelessness is problematic and different definitions may obscure the real extent of the problem. If there were 105,000 homeless people on census night, it is likely that a far higher number of individuals experience homelessness at some time during any given year.

Recent examinations of homelessness in Australia suggest that the characteristics of people who find themselves without adequate housing are becoming increasingly diverse (e.g. Sydney City Mission 1995), with multiple routes to a variety of homeless experiences (Mackenzie & Chamberlain 2003). Despite the increasing diversity, there are certain segments of the Australian population that are more vulnerable to becoming homeless: anecdotal evidence suggests that individuals leaving criminal justice custody are one such group (e.g. CACH 2001). Those leaving custody typically face multiple disadvantages that leave them at a heightened risk of becoming homeless. Unless these disadvantages and accommodation problems are addressed, many individuals leaving custody find their return to the community impossible to sustain, leading to high rates of re-offending and return to prison.

This report seeks to examine the current state of knowledge concerning prisoners and post-release accommodation. In particular it:

- ▶ examines correlates and hypothesised pathways into homelessness identified in previous research and literature;
- ▶ recaps existing research into prisoners post-release and their housing situation;
- ▶ explores the relationship between the types of social disadvantage among homeless people and social disadvantage among ex-prisoners; and
- ▶ reviews the types of policies surrounding ex-prisoners and accommodation and in particular how Australian jurisdictions are responding to the issue of post-release homelessness.

Before examining the specific question of ex-prisoner homelessness, it is important to place this understanding in the context of what is known about homelessness more generally. It is not proposed that this paper conducts an in-depth examination of the general issue of homelessness or seeks to provide a definite understanding of the causes of general homelessness or the characteristics or experiences of the broader homeless population. Such an examination has been conducted elsewhere in various ways, is beyond the scope of this paper and would threaten to detract from the specific issue of ex-prisoner homelessness that is at the heart of this paper.

However, it is important that the issue of ex-prisoner homelessness be placed in context, and supported by an understanding of homelessness more broadly. To achieve this, the next section will give an overview of homelessness by considering

<sup>1</sup> Issues of what homelessness means will be discussed in greater detail later in this document.

some characteristics of the homeless population, some factors that may contribute to homelessness and the pathways through which people become homeless. Once this context is established, the paper will then move on to look more closely at the challenges and disadvantages ex-prisoners face in trying to return to the community and how these challenges and disadvantages may contribute to the experience of post-release homelessness.

## 2. The extent of the problem

### **The size of the Australian homeless population**

As noted above, it has been estimated that on Census night 1996 there were over 105,000 homeless people in Australia. This estimate seeks to take into account not only those living and sleeping on the streets, but those who do not have access to stable and secure accommodation. These may be people living in accommodation situations which are neither stable or secure, such as those in temporary supported accommodation, those staying with others in circumstances that offer no security of tenure and those living in overcrowded or inadequate accommodation. There is a great diversity of accommodation situations people find themselves in and there will always be people living in marginalised situations that fall outside definitions of homelessness, or in situations where they are hidden from view such as those who may be superficially accommodated but in tenuous circumstances. Therefore any estimate of homelessness can never be more than an estimate.

As estimates derived from the census figure are snapshots, they do not measure the numbers of people who move into and out of homelessness during a given period. The estimate does not include people who had been homeless at any time before or after the census but happened to have accommodation at the time census was taken. The actual number of Australians experiencing homelessness at some stage is likely to be much higher than this estimate.

Another indicator of the extent of homelessness is the number of people requiring the services provided under the Supported Accommodation Assistance Program (SAAP) a Commonwealth and State funded program that provides services to people experiencing homelessness or at risk of homelessness. SAAP is a large-scale program, with \$310.4 million in total recurrent funding provided during the 2002/03 financial year and 1,282 agencies operating across Australia which are at least partly funded by SAAP (AIHW 2003: xvii).

It is estimated that SAAP agencies in Australia supported 97,600 clients during 2002/03, providing 176,300 occasions of support (ibid.). On average, between 21,100 and 22,500 support periods were provided on any one day during that year.

### **Diversity in the population of people experiencing homelessness**

The diverse routes by which individuals find themselves without a home, and the diversity in experiences of homelessness mean that it is inappropriate to speak of the 'homeless' as a single group. Some characteristics are shared by some individuals in the homeless population though, so researchers have attempted to describe discernable subgroups among the homeless population, to identify the factors associated with their homelessness, and to create typologies that can help practitioners pinpoint the best time and the best means to intervene to help people exit homelessness, or prevent people at risk of homelessness from becoming so.

Traditional concepts of people who are homeless typically revolve around single older men with chronic alcohol misuse issues who are literally living on the street, but

not all people experiencing homelessness conform to this stereotype. Practitioners working with the homeless population have identified a variety of subgroups, including:

- ▶ homeless youth;
- ▶ aged homeless;
- ▶ homeless families; and
- ▶ single homeless women (e.g. Hoogland 2001).

Indeed, SAAP explicitly recognises the diversity of its consumer base in the client groupings employed in the National Data Collection (NDC) (AIHW 2003) and to which services are targeted:

- ▶ males alone (under 25 versus 25 and over);
- ▶ females alone (under 25, or 25 and above);
- ▶ couples with, or without, children; and
- ▶ females with children.<sup>2</sup>

Against the stereotypical conception of the homeless as primarily single older men it must be noted that men aged 60 years and over comprise only 1.7 per cent of the SAAP client base (AIHW 2003: 16). Males over 25 years presenting alone to SAAP services receive a greater proportion of SAAP support periods than other clients (31%; AIHW 2003: 21) but have the lowest median length of support period (AIHW 2003: 30). In contrast couples with children represent a relatively small proportion of the SAAP population, as determined by proportion of support periods (3%; AIHW 2003: 24) but require the longest periods of support (AIHW 2003: 30). This gives a small indication of the affect of homelessness on dependent children, especially when taken together with the finding that ‘males with children’ are the least prevalent SAAP client group but require the second highest length of support period, while females with children are both highly represented within the number of support periods and require relatively lengthy periods of intervention (AIHW 2003: 24 and 30).

These categories describing the major groups of recipients of homelessness services do not, however, capture the full diversity of individuals living with homelessness. Within each of these broad service categories, there are further divisions of descriptors, such as women and children escaping family violence. Broader conceptions recognise that not all homeless people live on the streets, with many having access to shelter sometimes, but shelter that is not necessarily safe or secure (CACH 2001: 10). Not all homelessness is chronic, with some people experiencing homelessness only on a single occasion or at different times during their lives (ibid.), perhaps linked to periods of incarceration. It is also important to recognise that homeless people are not, as the CACH puts it, ‘a breed apart’ and have work and family histories like most in the community, yet experience challenges in

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<sup>2</sup> These groupings are relatively arbitrary however, and simply reflect the diversity of the SAAP client base rather than any cohesive categories of individuals experiencing homelessness.



their lives that prevent them maintaining secure accommodation. Often, it is noted, people experiencing homelessness are children whose parents have experienced homelessness.

There is also a proportion of the population whose homelessness is ‘hidden’. An individual’s homeless state can be hidden by virtue of the fact that the person is living a transient lifestyle, or housed in extremely marginal accommodation, and/or fails to seek assistance or even self-identify as homeless (for example Healey 2002).

Attempts have been made, therefore, to capture *all* of those subgroups that can be identified within the homeless population, regardless of self-identification or service receipt. Specific subgroups that have received attention include (e.g. see CACH 2001; CACH 2003; Neil & Fopp 1994; Rough Sleepers Unit 2001):

- ▶ people who have recently experienced a catastrophic personal event;
- ▶ people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds;
- ▶ people recently arrived as refugees;
- ▶ Indigenous people;
- ▶ people living in rural and remote areas;
- ▶ youths, who are often escaping situations of family violence and abuse (Hagan & McCarthy 1997);
- ▶ people with complex needs<sup>3</sup>; and
- ▶ people exiting institutions, such as prisons, mental health facilities, hospitals, state care, or the military.

The defining characteristics of these subgroups are not mutually exclusive. A person may fall into multiple subgroups depending on which aspect of the person or their situation is being examined. In some instances the defining characteristics also capture vulnerabilities (or indicators linked to vulnerabilities) that research has shown can act to precipitate or perpetuate homelessness.

### **The size and structure of the Australian prison population**

As at 30 June 2002 there were 22,492 adults held in custody in Australia (ABS 2003: 1). This figure includes non-convicted and non-sentenced prisoners held on remand as well as sentenced prisoners, the latter comprising 18,078 of those held in custody. While a proportion of these prisoners were serving lengthy sentences, many more were not. Taking into account parole periods and remissions, some 29 per cent of the prison population were expected to serve less than 12 months in prison. This figure was higher amongst the over-represented Indigenous prison population, 38 per cent of whom were expected to be released after serving less than 12 months. These figures likely underestimate the total extent of those serving relatively short sentences, as they represent a ‘snapshot’ of prisoners at that time and do not account

<sup>3</sup> Defined as those with seven or more support needs, though this has not necessarily been operationalised at the service delivery level (see CACH 2001).

for those who come and go from prison over time. For instance, in the quarter to 30 September 2003 there were 5,969 receptions of sentenced prisoners into Australian correctional institutions (ABS 2002). For the 12 months to 30 September 2003, there were over 24,000 sentenced receptions. Snapshot population figures also do not account for the fact that a proportion of those released would return to prison during a 12 month period.

Overall, these figures show that a large number of people enter and leave Australian correctional institutions over any given period of time. There are no national data maintained on the numbers of persons being released from prison custody in Australia. It is difficult to maintain such data for a range of reasons, including different data collection and operational practices between Australian jurisdictions and the fact that the same individuals may enter and leave prison on a number of occasions during any given survey period. However, it has been estimated that the number of adult prisoners re-entering the mainstream community is upwards of 43,000 annually (Baldry et al. 2003c: 3).

The number of ex-prisoners returning to the community has been increasing in recent years. The number of adult prisoners in Australia increased by five per cent, or 1,063 individuals, in the 12 months from 30 June 2002 to 30 June 2003 (ABS 2002: 1). The rate of adult imprisonment increased by three per cent in the same period. An increase in the rate of imprisonment inevitably results in an increase in the rate of former prisoners returning to the community, particularly as the majority of prisoners serve less than 12 months (Baldry et al. 2003b: 14). While it is not clear how many of this group find themselves without a home, a disproportionate number of ex-prisoners relative to the general population experience homelessness. As the number of people leaving prison increases, the number of ex-prisoners facing homelessness must also increase.

Another way of considering the extent to which elements of the Australian population move in and out of correctional settings is to note the rate at which people re-offend. ABS data (2003) show that 58 per cent or more of prisoners held in custody at 30 June 2002 had served a previous term of imprisonment, a figure that rose to 78 per cent for Indigenous prisoners. Of prisoners released from Australian institutions during 1999/2000, 47 per cent had received a further correctional sentence within two years of release and 37 per cent had been imprisoned (SCRCSSP 2003).

Taken together, these figures show that a relatively large group of people enter and leave Australian prisons, and a large number of those return to prison at some stage. While there are many possible reasons why people offend and re-offend, it is worth considering whether problems with attaining and maintaining safe, secure and stable accommodation are somehow linked to this problem. If it can be shown that homelessness is a problem for ex-prisoners, it is then worth considering whether the ex-prisoner population has characteristics in common with the broader population of homeless people, and whether there are characteristics that set ex-prisoners apart from this broader population.

Just how prison and post-release housing act to influence the probability of recidivism is not well understood, but available evidence to date suggests that the experience

of imprisonment may place some individuals at increased risk of becoming homeless and therefore, potentially, at an even greater risk of re-offending.

### **The extent of ex-prisoner homelessness**

There is little evidence available to show what proportion of homeless people are ex-prisoners, though Travis, Solomon and Waul (2001: 36) cite a number of US estimates. One study from the late 1980s suggested that up to a quarter of all homeless people had served some time in prison. In California it has been estimated that at any given time 10 per cent of that state's parolees are homeless, with this figure increasing in the major cities to be as much as 30 to 50 per cent of parolees experiencing homelessness. In New York City, up to 20 per cent of people released from city jails each year are homeless or in unstable housing (Rodriguez & Brown 2003 :2).

A South Australian Department for Correctional Services survey estimated that about 10 per cent of clients under community-based supervision were without safe, secure and stable housing, a figure that rose to 23 per cent for female ex-prisoners (Social Inclusion Board 2003: 47–8).

A large proportion of individuals leave prison without accommodation arranged, or without any clear idea where or how they are going to find accommodation. Australian studies have found that a majority of prisoners have no expectations about where they will be living, except that many of them expect to have problems finding accommodation (Baldry 2001: 5; Carnaby 1998: 31).

It is difficult to estimate what proportion of SAAP clients are ex-prisoners. Some 1.6 per cent of people seeking assistance from SAAP services cite having recently left an institution as their main reason for seeking assistance (AIHW 2003: 26) and in a proportion of these cases that institution may have been a prison. This figure is likely to be a severe underestimate though, as many ex-prisoners may not consider having left prison as the reason why they are seeking assistance. Rather they are likely to cite one or more of the far more prevalent reasons, such as their usual accommodation being unavailable, relationship or family breakdown or their previous accommodation having ended through eviction or otherwise (ibid.). In this case, the available data do not allow for a consideration of those circumstances that have taken place between the time a person left prison and the time they presented to a SAAP service looking for help. This may have been a long or a short period of time and many critical circumstances could have occurred in the ex-prisoner's life during that time. As will be discussed later, ex-prisoners may be particularly vulnerable to critical changes impacting on their accommodation.

In examining the reasons people have sought SAAP assistance though, it is noted that one of the primary reasons women seek help is because they are escaping domestic violence. Some 51.8 per cent of women with children and 43.9 of lone women under 25 years cite domestic violence as their main reason for seeking assistance. The relationship between domestic violence and homelessness will be discussed in greater depth in Sections three and four in Part one of this report. While it is not possible to say from available data whether either the woman or her partner

have ever been imprisoned, and therefore not possible to determine whether the domestic violence has an ex-prisoner component, there are clearly criminal justice issues involved in any domestic violence situation. As will be discussed later, there is an increased likelihood of domestic violence in relationships involving ex-prisoners and women and children escaping domestic violence are particularly vulnerable to becoming homeless.

Another possible indicator of ex-prisoner homelessness is that in 4.7 per cent of closed support periods provided under SAAP, the client gave their form of accommodation immediately before the support period as 'institutional' (AIHW 2003: 49). This figure represents 5,752 support periods. Again this is likely to be a severe underestimate. While only a proportion of those citing an institution as their previous accommodation are referring to a correctional institution, the figure only takes into account those who went straight from prison or another institution to the SAAP agency. Many ex-prisoners are likely to have some form of accommodation between leaving prison and needing SAAP assistance. They may be able to temporarily stay with family or friends but this accommodation may become unavailable, because it was only ever offered short-term, due to a breakdown in the relationship or for other reasons such as the ex-prisoner's inability to contribute financially. Some ex-prisoners may stay for a short time in emergency accommodation, or they may stay in a boarding house until their limited pool of money runs out. Against this possibility it is noteworthy that a majority of support periods (54.5%; AIHW 2003: 49) were provided to clients apparently living in one of these suggested circumstances immediately before seeking assistance. A further 8.9 per cent were to clients living rough in a car, tent, park, street or squat and it is likely that a number of ex-prisoners would be included in this group.

### 3. An overview of homelessness

#### Pathways to homelessness

One way of conceptualising the ways in which people become homeless is to consider homelessness as the product of certain trigger events, certain welfare needs, and the absence of certain factors known to protect from homelessness. For example, a trigger event may be release from an institution, such as from prison. The ex-prisoner may have a range of social disadvantages and in the absence of protective factors like employment and a strong social support network, may find themselves in housing crisis (see Rough Sleepers Unit 2001). Other trigger events may include financial problems, relationship breakdowns, family dysfunction or the development or exacerbation of problems such as psychiatric or physical disability, alcohol or drug misuse, or offending behaviour. Any of these trigger events can lead to a situation where a person or a family find themselves no longer able to remain in a home and possibly unable to access another.

Pathways into homelessness in Australia were examined in a recent study that identified three types of homeless ‘careers’.<sup>4</sup> The notion of homelessness as a ‘career’ has come from a recognition of homelessness as a process and one that follows certain temporal directions. This approach recognises that people do not necessarily become homeless at some point and remain without a home for the rest of their life (Chamberlain & Johnson 2003: 12). People may become homeless for a time, re-establish themselves in stable housing and then lose this stability again. An individual may experience periods of relative accommodation stability in between instances of homelessness.

Importantly, variation in the careers typology is intended to highlight key points at which homelessness interventions may have most impact rather than to make strong statements about what lies behind home loss (MacKenzie & Chamberlain 2003).

The research has identified some specific types of homeless career:

#### Youth homelessness

Family conflict can result in a young person cycling in and out the family home and in and out of a series of temporary and unstable housing situations, such as staying with friends. In the absence of support and access to safe and affordable housing, they are at risk of ongoing homelessness. Without successful intervention, the homeless youth is vulnerable to homelessness that continues into adulthood.

Youths will typically make an initial, tentative break from home and family as a ‘runaway’ (Chamberlain & Johnson 2003: 13). Some individuals will run away once and soon return, while others will tend to move in and out of the home. Some of these individuals will go on to make a permanent break from the home and may enter the sub-culture of homeless people. A proportion of these youths will become immersed in the homeless sub-culture to the extent that they accept homelessness as a way of life and move into chronic homelessness.

<sup>4</sup> The word career was intentionally selected, to capture the notion of progression through a series of events before full identification as a homeless person.

In contrast to youths, those who become homeless as adults tend to experience a sudden, dramatic loss of stable accommodation, perhaps due to a relationship breakdown or financial difficulties (Chamberlain & Johnson 2003: 14). This state of homelessness can continue for some time if the individual's circumstances do not improve. Being homeless may tend to make the circumstances or problems worse.

### Adult homelessness following housing crisis

This typology sees adults with welfare needs such as poverty and accumulated debt confronted with the trigger of home or job loss. Because adults often do not have the option to return to a parental or family home, Mackenzie and Chamberlain note that this scenario can see individuals quickly slide into chronic (and therefore intractable) homelessness. Preventing tenancy breakdown is therefore crucial to preventing this form of homeless career from developing.

### Adult homelessness following family breakdown

Adults escaping family breakdown or violence, like the young people described above, often cycle in and out of the home in a series of homelessness and reconciliation episodes. Like young people, it is important to intervene during this phase either through appropriate supports or genuine family reconciliation. Unfortunately, this is especially difficult because many adults involved in family breakdown fail to admit problems until the trigger event that marks the final break with the home.

### Youth to adult homelessness

For a significant group of people, a youth homelessness career can be a pathway into adult homelessness, in the form of either chronic or episodic homelessness (Mackenzie & Chamberlain 2003: 51). These may be young people whose problems may not have been addressed through early intervention or through supported accommodation.

In some cases the adult who experiences homelessness through one of the above pathways may eventually come to accept homelessness as a way of life and move into being chronically homeless.

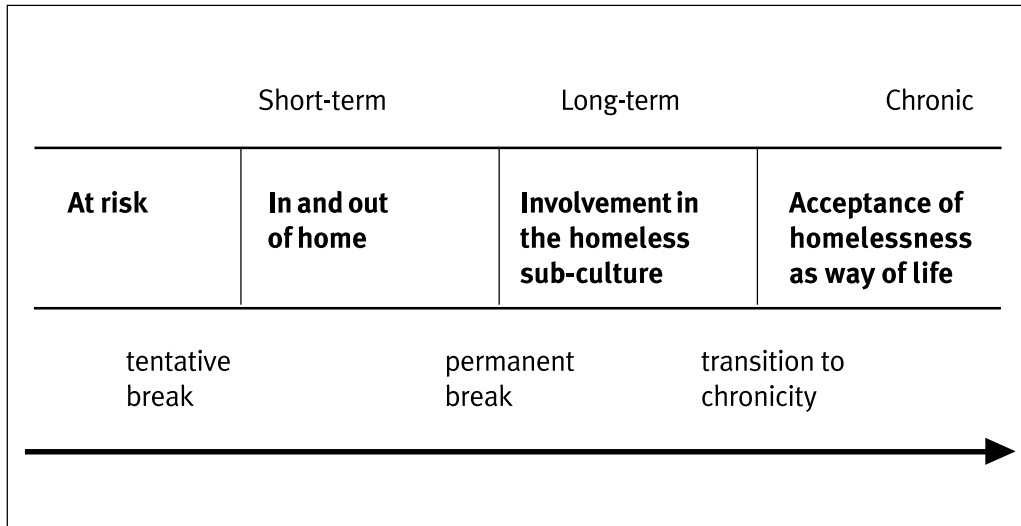
The route of prisoners into homelessness may follow any of these paths, because as will be shown below, prisoners are subject to a range of personal and systemic disadvantages that make for numerous trigger situations over the life span, a minimum of protective factors, and complex welfare needs.

The different models of a typical youth homelessness career and an adult homelessness career are in figures 1 and 2.

## Theories about homelessness

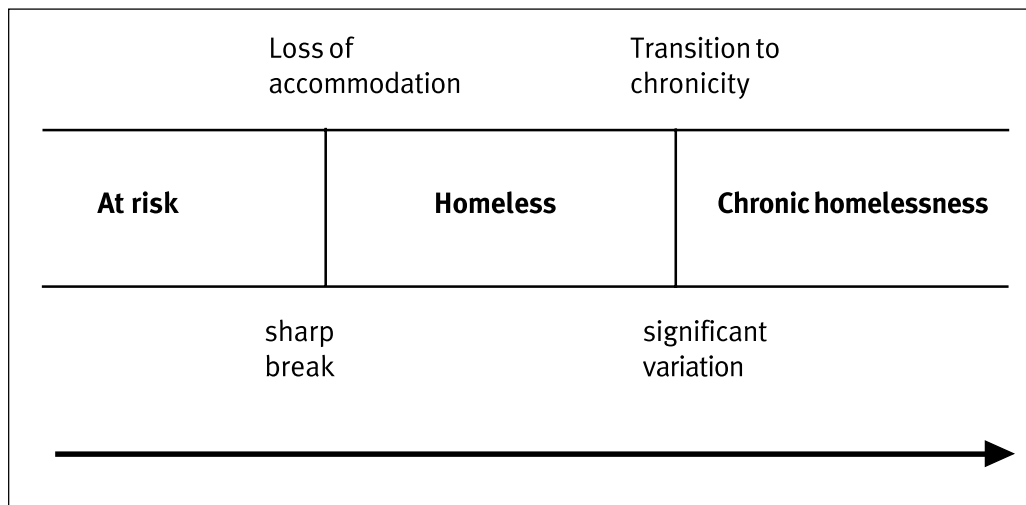
Theories about the causes of homelessness can be divided into two broad categories: those that focus on aspects of the individual, and factors related to social structure, macro-economic and systemic factors. Theories that centre on aspects the individual attribute the reasons for homelessness to personal deficits of the individual and often emphasise the role of free will and agency in determining a person's life course. Structural approaches on the other hand place the reasons for homelessness outside the control of the individual and within broader social and economic factors.

**Figure 1: Typical model of the youth homeless career**



Source: Chamberlain & MacKenzie (1998: 71)

**Figure 2: Typical model of the adult homeless career**



Source: Chamberlain & Johnson (2003: 13; from Chamberlain & Johnson (2002: 29))

While much of the published literature on homelessness tends to divide theories about homelessness along these two dimensions, this approach has attracted some criticism. Chamberlain and Johnson (2003: 9) note that individualistic explanations tend to disregard the broader social context in which individual choices are made and behaviours arise. In doing so they tend to divert attention away from these structural factors and the effect of broader social influences on the lives of individuals within the society. On the other hand, Chamberlain and Johnson (ibid.) note that many writers discuss the role of societal factors such as poverty or unemployment as contributors to homelessness without addressing the fact that some poor people and some unemployed people become homeless but others do not. Structural approaches, they contend, fail to take into account the role of 'personal vulnerabilities' as an explanation for the differential effect of structural influences.

Nonetheless, the duality between individual and structural factors is reflected in most of the literature on the topic and guides much of the policy thinking on homelessness. For this reason the following consideration of the social disadvantages that contribute to homelessness will be framed in terms of this duality of personal and systemic factors.

## **Social disadvantages that contribute to homelessness**

The literature has shown that there are certain social factors, constituting forms of social disadvantage, which can contribute to the likelihood of homelessness or exacerbate the experience of homelessness. These factors cannot always be said to be a cause of homelessness. As discussed later, it can be difficult or impossible to establish causality in relation to homelessness. There are certain types of social disadvantage though that are particularly prevalent in the homeless population and which must be either resolved or understood if an individual's homelessness is to be addressed. Some of these are factors linked primarily to the individual, others to the broader society.

### **Aspects of the person linked to homelessness**

#### **Mental illness**

There is very strong evidence for an association between a history of psychiatric hospitalisation and homelessness, with de-institutionalisation of persons with mental illness leading to a rise in the proportion of mentally ill persons among the homeless (Baldry 2001: 6). Homeless mentally ill people are also 40 times more likely to be arrested and 20 times more likely to be imprisoned than those with stable, suitable accommodation (ibid.).

A review of 14 separate studies from the literature on psychological distress and psychiatric disorders among homeless youth in Australia showed that homeless youth usually score significantly higher on measures of psychological distress than domiciled control groups (Kamieniecki 2001). Rates of psychiatric disorders are usually at least twice as high among homeless youth compared with youth in the general population. There is also some evidence that homeless youth experience very high rates of suicidal behaviour but methodological problems make comparisons with the general community difficult (ibid.).



In one study 100 per cent of homeless women and more than 90 per cent of homeless men surveyed in Sydney had suffered at least one event of trauma in their life (Buhrich, Hodder & Teesson 2000). Fifty-eight per cent of homeless people surveyed had suffered serious physical assault and 55 per cent had witnessed someone being badly injured or killed. Half of the women and 10 per cent of the men had been raped (ibid.). UK studies have found nearly half of all rough sleepers have been assaulted at least once, with more than one in three having been wounded at least once (Crisis 2003). Rough sleepers are 15 times more likely than the general population to be victims of assault and 35 times more likely to be wounded (ibid.). More than three-quarters (78%) of rough sleepers had been victims of crime at least once during their last period of sleeping rough (ibid.). As depression and post-traumatic stress disorder are associated with a history of trauma (Buhrich, Hodder & Teesson 2000), it is likely that at least a proportion of homeless people have developed a psychological or psychiatric condition as a result of trauma experienced while being homeless.

Having a mental illness, or more accurately, having a psychiatric disability related to mental illness, can affect a person's capacity to secure and maintain housing in a variety of ways (Reynolds, Inglis & O'Brien 2002: 9 & 42). The mental illness can affect a person's basic ability to undertake those activities necessary for accessing and sustain a tenancy, such as the ability to complete a tenancy application form, maintain regular rent payments, maintain positive relationships with neighbours or in shared situations and seek assistance when required (Reynolds et al.: 42). A person living with mental illness may need support in various areas of their life and coordinated assistance to ensure that problems in non-housing areas do not impact on their ability to maintain accommodation. Providing appropriate support is rendered problematic by that fact that the psychiatric disabilities arising from mental illness tend to be episodic and a person's capacities for independent living and needs for support can fluctuate and be unpredictable (ibid.). A person able to maintain housing and employment at one stage may enter into a crisis situation and become heavily reliant on others for support. There are challenges for supporting agencies in providing the appropriate assistance while meeting the desire of most mentally ill people to be able to live independently.

### Alcohol and other drug (AOD) misuse

International studies show that substance-use disorders are very prevalent among homeless people, occurring in about two-thirds to three-quarters of homeless men and one-quarter to one-half of women (Teesson, Hodder & Buhrich 2003: 464).

Social deprivation and illicit drug use have been shown to be closely linked, with an extremely deprived person 10 times more likely to have dependence problems than a person experiencing no deprivation (Roberts 2003: 21). Twelve months prevalence for alcohol dependence amongst homeless people living in inner Sydney has been found to be 35 per cent, a rate three times higher than the general Australian population (Teesson et al. 2003: 467). Homeless people in Sydney were six times more likely to have a drug-use disorder and 33 times more likely to have an opiate disorder than the general Australian population (ibid.). In contrast to findings in the international literature, homeless women in Sydney are just as likely to have to have substance use problems as homeless men (ibid.: 469).

The relationship between substance abuse and homelessness is a complex one (ibid.: 470). In some cases the cost of maintaining illicit drug use may lead to users becoming homeless, as users will often finance their drug habits before they finance any accommodation. Lifestyles and behaviour resulting from illicit drug or alcohol use may cause conflicts or other problems leading to a loss of accommodation, including the loss of accommodation while incarcerated.

Whether homelessness has resulted from substance abuse or for unrelated reasons, homeless people are likely to come into contact with other people or situations that encourage illicit drug or alcohol abuse. In these circumstances substances may be abused due to pressure from others, or as a means of coping with the many problems that homelessness brings.

As Teesson et al. note (2003: 470), homelessness and substance abuse may not be directly related but have common causes such as multiple social disadvantage or exposure to a subculture conducive to drug and alcohol use and other problem behaviours.

### Intellectual or physical disability

US studies show that homeless people with a learning disability are more likely to be arrested and incarcerated than other homeless people (see Baldry 2001: 6).

People with intellectual and physical disabilities may be vulnerable to homelessness if their needs for support and assistance are not met, which may often be the case (CACH 2001: 37). Without adequate support, those with a disability may experience difficulties with employment, resulting poverty, social isolation and may be vulnerable to abuse and exploitation (ibid.).

### Childhood disadvantage

There is evidence to suggest that having been a ward of the state, or having spent an appreciable part of childhood in substitute or foster care, is a strong predictor of homelessness and incarceration in later life (Baldry 2001: 6). Having experienced institutional life during childhood may create the deficits in life-skills and functional abilities that are indicative of institutionalisation and which make it difficult for an individual to attain and retain suitable accommodation. Childhood disadvantage may also create deficits in terms of self-esteem, education and relationship-forming which can all contribute to difficulties in maintaining a lifestyle conducive to retaining independent accommodation.

### Poor physical health

It has been shown many times that homeless people are more likely than the general population to experience severe health problems. Being homeless tends to contribute to poor nutrition and hygiene and health problems associated with substance abuse may tend to mask other underlying health problems (CACH 2001: 35). There is also a marked tendency amongst homeless people to deny their own health problems and decline to approach health services for help (ibid.). Homeless people in the UK are 40 times more likely not to be registered with a GP than members of the general public and 55 per cent of surveyed homeless people had no contact with a GP in the previous year (Crisis 2003).

An analysis of clients at a charity-run meals service in Sydney showed that clients of the service as a whole were much more likely than the general population to report poor or fair health (Trevena, Nutbeam & Simpson 2001). Homeless people within the sample group were even worse off, being significantly more likely to report poor or fair health status than other clients of the service. As a whole, clients of the meals service showed a more serious pattern of illness than the general population, demonstrating serious illnesses such as digestive system diseases, depression and diabetes as well as colds and bronchitis (ibid.). In the UK, nearly one in 50 homeless people suffers from tuberculosis and rough sleepers are three times more likely to have chronic chest and breathing problems than the general population (Crisis 2003).

Zapf et al. (1996: 438) found no differences between the amount of contact homeless and non-homeless individuals had with health care professionals. They were also equally likely to be in need of dental care or self-report dental problems affecting their lifestyle. What this finding tells us about the health of homeless people is difficult to assess though as the authors note the possibility that the individuals may have had contact with health care professionals through the criminal justice system and that the criminal justice system may act as a gateway to health care services. It is also noteworthy that the authors did not appear to have made an assessment of differences in the state of health between homeless and non-homeless individuals, other than on the basis of dental care, so it is not known whether the general health of the homeless and non-homeless was in fact comparable.

### Aboriginality

Indigenous Australians are significantly over-represented in the homeless population, as they are on most, if not all, measures of social disadvantage. Indigenous Australians are overrepresented as SAAP clients relative to their population size. While Indigenous Australians make up approximately two per cent of the general Australian population they constitute approximately 18 per cent of the SAAP client population (AIHW 2003: 13). As discussed later in this report, there may be significant cultural differences in trying to understand and define homelessness within the Indigenous population and these differences may contribute to an underutilisation of SAAP services by Aboriginal people.

Indigenous people are not identified as a primary target group within SAAP data, rather they are incorporated at the primary level within other less specific categories such as 'single men', 'single women', 'young people' and 'families'. 'Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander peoples' are identified as a secondary target group. SAAP data shows that 148 SAAP-funded agencies, or 12 per cent of the total number of SAAP agencies identify Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander peoples as a secondary target group (SAAP Administrative Data 2002/03). A large proportion of those agencies provide crisis or short-term accommodation as their service delivery model (67 agencies or 45%) while significant numbers of agencies provide medium or long-term accommodation (16%), outreach support (11%) or multiple forms of service delivery (11%).

Some 148 SAAP agencies target Indigenous people as a secondary target group, and a further four agencies have a secondary target group of 'Other Special Characteristics' and have an apparent Indigenous focus (SAAP Administrative Data 2002/03). Thus there are a total of 152 SAAP agencies, 12 per cent of the total number of SAAP agencies, that target Indigenous clients. These agencies are distributed differentially between the states and territories, as shown in the following table:

**Table 1: Distribution of Indigenous-focused SAAP agencies between jurisdictions**

<b>State/ Territory</b>	<b>Total number of SAAP agencies</b>	<b>Number of SAAP agencies with apparent Indigenous focus</b>	<b>Percentage of SAAP agencies with apparent Indigenous focus</b>	<b>Percentage of Indigenous in general population</b>
ACT	37	3	8	1.2
NSW	397	50	13	1.9
NT	39	6	15	25.1
QLD	198	37	19	3.1
SA	86	10	12	1.6
TAS	37	0	0	3.5
VIC	364	12	3	0.5
WA	125	34	27	3.2

Source: SAAP National Data Collection Administrative Data 2002/03; ABS Census 2001

As this table indicates, there is no obvious relationship between the proportion of SAAP agencies with an apparent Indigenous focus in each jurisdiction and the proportion of that jurisdiction's general population who are Indigenous. The proportion of Indigenous people in the general population of each state and territory does not necessarily indicate the proportion of Indigenous people in that state or territory who are experiencing homelessness. A good deal more information and research is needed to understand whether SAAP services are appropriately distributed to meet the needs of Indigenous clients. As noted below, more knowledge is needed about the housing and service delivery needs of Indigenous people overall and this platform of knowledge is required before issues of service-targeting can be considered.

The data also do not allow an examination of the staffing profiles within each agency, so that there may well be agencies with Indigenous staff and/or providing Indigenous-specific sub-services who are just not captured within the broad administrative data. More knowledge is needed to understand how these agencies are delivering their services and how they are accessing their target clients. This should be informed too by an examination of whether there are other agencies providing services to Indigenous Australians under cooperative or other-funded models and how these services interact with or complement SAAP services.

It is also important to consider that in addition to those accessing SAAP services, there may be a very high number of Aboriginal people living in conditions where

they do not have a stable and secure home, or living in conditions that would not be considered acceptable to the general community. The work of Memmott, Long, Chambers and Spring (2003) has shown that the nature of homelessness among Indigenous people may be very different from the concepts and definitions applied to the non-Indigenous homeless. They suggest that the term 'homeless' not be used with Indigenous people, suggesting instead the term 'public place dwellers'. They note before European settlement Indigenous Australians did not establish permanent shelters but made their homes in various campsites, erecting temporary shelters when necessary. An Indigenous concept of 'home' does not necessarily incorporate the concept of a structure within which a person resides on an ongoing basis. For an Indigenous person the concept of 'home' may be more closely linked with an emotional attachment to a particular place, which does not necessarily have a residential dwelling attached to it, or be linked to living with or in proximity to relatives. Where an Indigenous person is and who they are with may be more relevant to the notion of home than any physical structure around them.

Memmott et al's proposed definitional structure reflects differences in the way Indigenous people might utilise public places. It recognises that some people may be voluntarily staying in public places, for different lengths of time including overnight, despite having a place of residence in a home community which they could return to. The structure also recognises that some Indigenous people may be staying in public places reluctantly, such as those who wish to return home but lack the funds to do so. Importantly, Memmott et al's proposed definitional structure includes a category of 'spiritually homeless people' who are experiencing a separation from their traditional land, family and kinship networks and may be in a state of crisis regarding their personal identity as determined by traditional Indigenous identity structures.

Memmott et al. also note that the differences in Indigenous concepts of homelessness may also lead to critical differences in the services and assistance needed by public place dwellers, for who provision of accommodation may not be a desired outcome. The authors note that the complex nature of Indigenous homelessness has rarely been expressed within policy frameworks and that strategies for addressing homelessness are based almost exclusively on definitions of homelessness that include housing and accommodation.

The issues raised by an examination of the SAAP data and by the work of Memmott et al. strongly suggest the need for further research more closely examining the accommodation circumstances of Indigenous Australians. There is a need for more research with Aboriginal communities in urban and regional areas to assess what kinds of SAAP services could most usefully address their needs. There is also a need to develop a greater understanding of which SAAP agencies are assisting Indigenous people and how they are doing this. Given the likely difficulties that may arise from attempts to work directly with Aboriginal communities, seeking help from staff in SAAP-funded and other agencies may be a way of working towards the kinds of understandings that are needed if Indigenous homelessness is to be genuinely be understood.

## Systemic factors linked to homelessness

### Unemployment

There is a very strong link between being able to access regular, stable employment and having the means to acquire and maintain stable and secure housing. Employment is in many ways a key to housing stability and is essential for preventing and reducing homelessness (CACH 2001: 14). There are very high levels of unemployment amongst the homeless and people experiencing homelessness, or facing the risk of homelessness, may need additional help securing employment (ibid.).

It is now close to 20 years since Ramsay (1986: 60) wrote:

The ex-offender's need for assistance in terms of housing and employment assistance is far greater now than it was 10 or 20 years ago. In the past, the ex-offender's problem lay in holding down a job rather than in obtaining one, while in most areas sufficient rented accommodation existed for him to be able to find somewhere to live, by using his own earnings and acting upon his own initiative.

After rising between 1973 and 1993, the overall unemployment rate for males and females has fallen in the last 10 years, together with the proportion of people in long-term unemployment (ABS 2002; ABS 2004). During the same period the labour force participation rate for males has fallen (ibid.). Given that many homeless people may not be registered as job seekers, many homeless people may not be recognised in official unemployment statistics and the homeless group may not be benefiting from improvements in employment levels in the overall community.

At the same time for youth, including homeless youth, the situation appears to have declined, Kryger noting (1998: 1) that:

On almost every indicator, young people are considerably worse off today than twenty, or even ten, years ago. Wages are lower while suicides, unemployment, and homelessness are all higher than the case in earlier years. ...Youth participation in education has improved but this may be a reflection of the worsening labour market situation for youth.

More recent information supports the contention that the situation for youth is not improving, with young unemployed males nearly nine times more likely to commit suicide than young males in work or study (Balogh 2004: 1). Continuing high unemployment rates of 21.6 per cent for Australians aged 15 to 19 and 23 per cent for those aged 20 to 24 may contribute to this situation (ibid.). For teenage Indigenous Australians unemployment is significantly higher, at approximately 45 per cent (ibid.). These figures clearly represent a difficult situation for young people trying to find employment and hence afford accommodation, especially those who have histories that include institutionalisation, criminal behaviour and incarceration and low levels of education and literacy.

Homeless people may face extra difficulties in securing employment through the lack of a stable base. Not having a home address, or only being able to provide a hostel or shelter as an address, severely limits a person's ability to make contact

with potential employers. Not having a home also makes it very difficult for a person to present appropriately for job interviews and may also affect self-esteem in a way that stops a person being motivated to seek employment or able to properly prepare and present themselves to a potential employer.

Employment initiatives and programs that have targeted homeless people have been able to produce positive and sustained results and can alleviate homelessness while helping people to address substance abuse and other problems (CACH 2001: 17). SAAP clients identify employment as a major issue in their lives and virtually all of the unemployed SAAP clients surveyed by O'Meara (cited in CACH 2001: 17) indicated they would work or take part in an employment program if given the chance.

### Poverty

Poverty or severe material deprivation has been said to be a root cause of the majority of homelessness (Sydney City Mission 1995: 10). The relationship between homelessness and poverty is a direct one, in that those living in situations of poverty lack the income and material means to independently secure stable accommodation and are reliant on welfare services to provide them with basic means of support. Unless those in poverty are able to access forms of assistance they may have no choice other than to live in situations of homelessness or sub-standard accommodation.

Hagan and McCarthy (1997: 228) cite studies which found that the problems faced by youth living on the streets, and the offending behaviours they adopted to deal with these, were remarkably similar between youths living in the very poor nation of Honduras and those living in the much wealthier USA. It appears that the experience of poverty and its resulting problems amongst the homeless is a factor more closely linked to the nature of homelessness than any broader national economic circumstances.

A very high majority of homeless people are reliant on welfare as their principal or sole form of income while they are homeless (CACH 2001: 19). The experience of being homeless can make it harder to access social security entitlements due to a lack of understanding about rights and entitlements and the difficulty of accessing and complying with administrative arrangements without a home base to operate from (CACH 2001: 19 and 21). While social security payments may be enough to provide people with the means to survive on a daily basis, and may allow them to access low-price accommodation such as boarding houses, the limited income provided by income support is usually not enough to allow people to save for bond, rent in advance, utility connection costs and other expenses necessary for establishing housing (CACH 2001: 19). The problems of a limited income are further exacerbated when people have debts or substance abuse problems.

### Domestic violence

Escaping from domestic violence is a major cause of homelessness for women and their children. As noted previously, domestic violence was cited as the main reason for seeking SAAP assistance by 51.8 per cent of women with children and 43.9 per cent of lone women under 25 (AIHW 2003: 26). A significant proportion of SAAP

funding is allocated to agencies whose target group is women escaping domestic violence with only agencies targeting young people receiving more funding (AIHW 2003: 4).

Overseas studies show that a similar situation exists in the UK and the USA, with a number of studies showing that approximately half of all women experiencing homelessness or accommodation problems cite domestic violence as the major cause of their situation (see Crisis [UK] 2003; Office of the Deputy Prime Minister - ODPM - [UK] 2002: 7; National Coalition Against Domestic Violence [USA] 2003; National Coalition for the Homeless [USA] 1999; Regional Task Force on the Homeless, [San Diego USA] undated, accessed March 2004).

Domestic violence is a strong contributing factor for those experiencing 'repeat' homelessness, as many women will cycle in and out of being homeless and trying to establish a positive relationship within the abusive household (ODPM 2002). The long-term emotional and psychological damage caused by domestic violence and by housing instability can be a determining factor in the ability of many women and children to settle into ongoing housing after an episode of accommodation crisis (ODPM 2002).

Being a victim of violence in other contexts as well emerges as a risk factor for many homeless women. In the UK, 40 per cent of young women who become homeless have experienced sexual abuse in childhood or adolescence (Crisis 2003). In the USA, nearly all homeless women (92%) have reported experiencing severe physical and/or sexual assault at some point in their lives, with 66 per cent having experienced severe physical violence by a care giver and 43 per cent having been sexually assaulted during childhood (National Coalition Against Domestic Violence 2003). While women at each socio-economic level can experience violence, it tends to be more prevalent in households with financial problems and women with limited economic means are at a greater risk of being homeless (Regional Task Force on the Homeless, accessed March 2004: 1–2). Women escaping domestic violence also tend to become isolated from family, friends and other forms of social support so are more likely to become reliant on service providers for assistance (ibid.: 2).

### Family breakdown

Some people may become homeless due to a breakdown in relationships with family or intimate partners which leave them no longer able to remain in their home, but without anywhere else to go. Relatively high rates of divorce, an increase in single parent households and related financial problems may all contribute to homelessness (Sydney City Mission: 12).

Homeless young people are often in situations where they cannot live in their family home due to violence or abuse or relations with their parents are not conducive to remaining in the home. A study of youth living in Kings Cross, Sydney found that 42 per cent had left home after being 'thrown out' and 48 per cent had left after an argument or problem, while 28 per cent of homeless youth in another study had been sexually abused before leaving home and most of those surveyed had received some form of physical punishment or unprovoked assault from a young age (Sydney City Mission: 12).



### Insufficient exit points from homelessness

Changes in public housing policy, together with large relative increases in private housing costs have created barriers for people seeking to exit homelessness, and bottlenecks for those seeking to move from supported accommodation into independent housing (Fopp 2002: 1). There is a particular difficulty with the move from crisis accommodation to short-medium term transitional accommodation. This impacts on supported accommodation services who cannot move existing clients on and therefore cannot offer services to new clients (ibid.: 1–2). The situation also means that clients are impeded in their efforts to progress with their return to the community and live independently. In some cases this may result in clients becoming discouraged and unmotivated, placing greater demands on support workers.

### Exclusion from the community

People who are homeless are typically isolated from many of the support structures available to others in the community (CACH 2001: 29). They may be cut off from family supports and friendship or other social networks for a broad range of reasons. Social isolation can contribute to an exacerbation of problems with accommodation, employment, mental health, personality and mood problems and offending behaviour. The problems that result from discrimination may tend to be exacerbated by social exclusion, which can in turn lead to further discrimination if the homeless person's behaviour, communications and appearance come to reflect their experience of marginalisation.

### Factors contributing to homelessness and their relationship to responses

Beliefs about the nature of the factors contributing to homelessness in turn dictate the types of responses used to address homelessness. Focus on systemic factors suggests altering social structures, such as implementing macro-economic change to foster employment. In contrast, if individual issues are thought to lie behind homelessness, interventions that require a person to alter their behaviours or attitudes will be employed, such as managing alcohol misuse. Focusing on individual issues, which is the more traditional approach, implicitly holds that a level of homelessness is inevitable, regardless of issues of social justice and inequity.

Of course these two causal approaches to homelessness are not mutually exclusive, and in many instances it is probably an interaction of the social and the personal that results in homelessness. Recognising the interactive role of the various factors also recognises the difficulty of assigning causality on the basis of temporal effect and this is particularly true for individual factors. As Chamberlain and Johnson have noted (2003: 10) while there are many studies establishing the correlation between homelessness and personal traits such as mental health issues or alcohol and other drug abuse, this correlation does not establish causality as it is not generally known which aspect of the correlation came first.

For example while an individual may display mental health problems and be homeless, it does not necessarily follow that the individual is homeless as a result of their mental health problems. It may be that the individual did not show mental

health problems before becoming homeless, and entered into homelessness for other reasons, but that the enormous strains and negative experiences that come from living on the streets may have triggered mental dysfunction. It may even be that it is the mental illness or substance abuse of another person, such as an intimate partner or family member, that has created the situation where an individual who is free of these problems becomes homeless (McKenzie & Chamberlain 2003: 54).

However the relationship operates in any given case, the critical point is that the existence of a problem such as psychiatric disability or substance abuse is likely to exacerbate the homelessness situation and may increase the likelihood that a person's homeless career will progress into chronicity (McKenzie & Chamberlain 2003: 57). Whether the existence of mental illness, substance abuse or any other form of disadvantage in a homeless person is the cause of their homelessness, or the result of it, is probably not as important as the need to understand and address the root cause of the disadvantage and prevent it from leading to a worsening of the person's already troubled situation.

## 4. Prisoner re-integration, recidivism and homelessness

Knowledge in the area of prisoner re-integration and recidivism<sup>5</sup> has been accumulating in recent years and we are starting to gain a fairly clear picture of the nature of homelessness, the particular social groups most at risk of becoming homeless and the barriers agencies and individuals face in accessing on-going and stable accommodation. A good deal of the available literature addresses homelessness generally, without any particular focus on homelessness among ex-prisoners, while elsewhere the literature considers re-integration and re-entry issues for ex-prisoners without placing any particular emphasis on homelessness.

There remains a lack of solid, empirical evidence regarding the accommodation experiences of ex-prisoners. There are few empirical studies of sufficient sample size to be representative of homeless ex-prisoners overall and there is a lack of theoretically and statistically supported insight into the relationship between housing, recidivism and re-integration to the community (Baldry et al. 2003c: 4). Gaining access to prisoners for research, and then following them through a longitudinal study, especially where a research team has limited resources can be difficult (Maplestone & Peeters 2003: 18–9) and these difficulties have no doubt constrained research in this area.

The situation has been addressed somewhat by Flat Out's examination of the experiences of female prisoners and former prisoners in Victoria (Carnaby 1998) and by Baldry, McDonnell, Maplestone and Peeter's (2003a; 2003b; 2003c; 2003d) short-term longitudinal study of persons leaving the prison system and re-entering the community in Victoria and NSW. Together with other material, which is largely policy-oriented more so than research-oriented, a picture is emerging of ex-prisoners in Australia facing significant barriers in attempting to secure accommodation on release from prison. This situation echoes that seen in the UK and USA.

### **The social disadvantages faced by returning prisoners**

Prisoners leaving custody are vulnerable to homelessness for a range of reasons. Research conducted both overseas and in Australia into the social positioning of offenders finds them, on average, highly disadvantaged relative to non-prisoners. Many prisoners enter prison from a position of significant social disadvantage and return to this position on release. Prisoners and ex-prisoners have been found to have levels of social disadvantage well beyond that of the general community on a broad range of factors such as employment, education, family and social relationships and health.

A range of social disadvantages have been found to be particularly associated with the prison population.

<sup>5</sup> For a full discussion of the definitional issues surrounding the 'homelessness', 'reintegration', 'recidivism' and related terms, see Appendix A.

## Mental health

Rates of mental illness among the prison population are difficult to determine as there may be high numbers of people with mental health problems in correctional facilities who have not been properly diagnosed or assessed. This may especially be the case if problem behaviours arising from a psychiatric disability are assessed by the criminal justice system as arising from free will rather than mental illness. Rates of mental illness among the US prison population have been estimated to be at least twice and possibly as much as four times that of the general population, and somewhere between 8 and 16 per cent of the prison population are believed to have at least one serious mental disorder requiring psychiatric treatment (Travis et al. 2001: 29).

Zapf et al. found a significantly higher proportion of homeless accused within a US jail population were severely mentally disordered than were domiciled individuals (1996: 438). The researchers also found a significant relationship between homelessness and negative psychotic symptoms. Their results indicated that homelessness was associated with prior psychiatric history and that significantly more of the homeless individuals in the study had a history of inpatient admissions than those who were not homeless.

## Chronic physical ill health

Prevalence of infectious disease is extremely high among the prison population. During 1997, between 20 and 26 per cent of those individuals in the USA with HIV/AIDS, approximately 30 per cent of those with hepatitis C and 38 per cent with tuberculosis had been released from a correctional facility (Travis et al. 2001: 28). The overall rate of confirmed AIDS cases among inmates was five times that of the general population, and five to seven times more prisoners tested HIV positive than the general population (ibid.). The rate of hepatitis C was even higher at nine times that of the population, a figure that is put in greater perspective by noting that in a 12 month period some 1.3 million individuals with hepatitis C infection were released from correctional facilities into the community (ibid.).

The mortality rate of prisoners who have recently returned to the community, especially those serving community corrections orders, exceeds both the prison population and the general community (Biles, Harding & Walker 1999). Graham (2003) found that the unnatural death rate of ex-prisoners in Victoria was 10 times that of the general community. The greatest risk of unnatural death was in the weeks immediately following release from prison and the risk was elevated for those who had previously been imprisoned.

## Inadequate education and low levels of literacy

The prison population overall shows a very low level of education and poor literacy, relative to the general population. Eighty per cent of young offenders in one study had left school with no form of qualification, compared with eight per cent in the general population (Smith & Stewart 1998: 101). Sixteen per cent had left school before the legal minimum age. Young offenders may face exclusion from the school system which, Smith and Stewart contend, is 'one of the formal legal mechanisms

by which troublesome people can be deliberately barred from participation in citizenship' (ibid.).

### Unemployment and welfare reliance

The prison population, and the homeless, face significant difficulties in securing and retaining employment. This may be due in part to stigmatisation and discrimination as discussed below, but is also likely to be due in part to poor levels of education and literacy and the lifestyle associated with illicit drug use and offending behaviour.

Studies of sources of income received by prisoners released from custody show that a majority of ex-prisoners are reliant on social security benefits, with a substantial minority having no form of income at all (Smith & Stewart 1998: 98). Only one-fifth of offenders studied were in receipt of income from wages and the income level of most offenders was very low.

Smith and Stewart (1998: 100), comparing data from 1965 and 1991, found a four-fold increase in the number of probationers having no form of income as well as a drop from 59 per cent to 21 per cent during that period in the number of probationers engaged in employment.

Economic hardship may be worse for female ex-prisoners than for male, with female prisoners in the USA having been shown to have lower pre-custody income levels than male prisoners and high levels of welfare dependence (Travis et al. 2001: 13).

Nilsson (2003: 77) in a study of Swedish prison inmates, found social resource deficiencies in employment and education to be strongly linked to increased levels of recidivism. This was particularly so for inmates with no prior history of imprisonment. The likelihood of re-offending was increased when an inmate experienced social resource deficiencies in a number of areas, including homelessness. Indicative of the magnification of difficulties that ex-prisoners may face, Nilsson (2003: 79) also found that having previously served time in prison was a greater risk factor for recidivism than any other indicators of social disadvantage.

A number of US studies have found that ex-prisoners with jobs commit fewer crimes than ex-prisoners without jobs (Finn 1998c). Ex-prisoners with higher income levels also commit fewer crimes than those with lower levels of income (ibid.).

Studies have found a reduced likelihood of employment among ex-prisoners and have found that unemployed ex-prisoners are more likely to be reconvicted than those in employment (Baldry et al. 2003c: 18; Webster et al. 2001). Studies have also found varying levels of unwillingness among employers to hire people with criminal records (Giguere & Dundes 2002). Employers cite concerns about offenders lacking people skills needed for customer interaction and customers' discomfort if they knew the would-be employee's status as major reasons for not wishing to hire offenders. Fear of victimisation by the offender, through violence or theft against the employer, was also a significant factor in employers' decisions.

Other studies have found that a period of imprisonment can lead to a life-time reduction in an individual's earning capacity (see Western, Kling & Weiman 2001). It appears this effect may be most pronounced for those offenders, especially white-collar offenders, who had a relatively high level of income and status before their imprisonment. The

effect may not occur with offenders, particularly violent and drug-related offenders, who may have had limited legitimate earnings before being imprisoned.

### Poverty

Poverty can be a direct cause of criminality, especially when coupled with the need to maintain an illicit drug habit (Ogilvie 2001: 3). Reductions in levels of income can be a direct trigger for involvement in criminal activity, with one researcher estimating that a 10 per cent decrease in an individual's wages was associated with a 10 to 20 per cent increase in that individual's criminal activity and likelihood of re-incarceration (Travis et al.: 31). This researcher's contention is an intriguing one when taken together with a separate finding that the experience of incarceration, by reducing an offender's level of employability due to interrupted experience and skills as well as stigmatisation, created a 'wage penalty' of some 10 to 20 per cent across the offender's life-time (Travis et al.: 32).

### Aboriginality

There is an over-representation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians in the criminal justice system, with Indigenous Australians 16 times more likely to be imprisoned than non-Indigenous Australians (ABS 2003). Indigenous status per se is not a factor directly linked to criminal justice involvement, however the social disadvantages experienced by this group at very high levels (e.g. unemployment, poverty, alcohol abuse) have been suggested as factors linked to the overrepresentation of this section of the Australian community in the criminal justice system (Weatherburn, Lind & Hua 2003). The cumulative disadvantages experienced by Indigenous people lead to outcomes such as far less access to affordable and stable housing than other Australians.

Baldry et al. (2003c: 20) in their longitudinal study of ex-prisoners re-entering the community found Indigenous Australian participants were far more likely to return to prison during a nine-month period than non-Indigenous participants. Of all participants in the sample, Indigenous women were found to have the highest rate of re-incarceration and homelessness. Among the related findings noted by the authors, which may well contribute to the high level of recidivism, were that Indigenous participants:

- ▶ had no available family support and were reliant on public and publicly assisted housing;
- ▶ came from, and after prison returned to, a very small cluster of highly disadvantaged suburbs, particularly in New South Wales;
- ▶ moved frequently within the same disadvantaged areas; and
- ▶ experienced a marked degree of homelessness post-release, with half the participants being homeless nine months after leaving prison.

### **The housing challenges faced by returning prisoners**

One thing that clearly emerges from examining the social disadvantages and challenges faced by the homeless population and the prisoner/ex-prisoner

population is that there is a strong level of concordance between the disadvantages they face. Released prisoners however face an additional layer of challenge when trying to make a successful return to the community. There are strong links between imprisonment and homelessness and ex-prisoners are particularly vulnerable to becoming homeless. Rodriguez and Brown (2003: 3) note three main factors that contribute to and complicate homelessness among people leaving prison:

- ▶ ex-prisoners face the same social and economic conditions that lead to homelessness among the general population;
- ▶ ex-prisoners returning to the community confront barriers to housing associated with their involvement with the criminal justice system; and
- ▶ there is a lack of ownership of the problem among government agencies and community organisations.

Rodriguez and Brown identified these factors in relation to post-release homelessness in the USA and to that extent the role of the third factor may differ a little to the Australian situation, something that will be examined more closely in section 7 of this paper. The first two factors are certainly attributable to the Australian situation, and it is the second in particular that will be explored in this section.

The prison experience itself can negatively impact on post-release housing opportunities. Baldry et al. (2003b: 15) concluded that imprisonment, even for a short period, is associated with increased homelessness and re-incarceration. They found many of their study's participants to be cycling in and out of prison, progressively becoming homeless and more socially isolated. These authors also note (Baldry et al. 2003d: 155–156) various international studies have found a significant relationship between being a recently released prisoner and experiencing poor housing and social integration.

Paylor (1995), using a scale he developed for measuring changes in the quality of housing, found that 51 per cent of former prisoners in his survey had experienced a negative change in the quality of their housing since being released from custody. Women were found to be at greater risk of homelessness and unsuitable accommodation after release than men.

Carlisle (1996) examined different tenure categories and found prisoners coming from certain accommodation situations more likely to suffer a loss of housing than others. In her study, the largest group of ex-prisoners who had lost housing were owner-occupiers whose properties had been repossessed when they could not pay their mortgage. All those ex-prisoners Carlisle interviewed who had been in private rental accommodation lost their homes while in prison, largely through ignorance of government housing benefits available in the UK to help them retain rented homes. A high proportion of those in the study had lost their homes indirectly through relationship breakdowns. Those that fared best in Carlisle's study were those in public housing, less than half of them losing their housing. While the situation in the UK is somewhat different to Australia, this finding does suggest the importance of assisting tenants to retain housing while in prison.

Corden, Kuipers and Wilson (1979) found a marked deterioration in living standards for recently released prisoners, compared with their accommodation before custody. They found a movement out of flats and furnished rooms into less desirable accommodation such as hostels. Half of those in private rental accommodation before imprisonment did not have rental accommodation after release and a much higher proportion were 'sleeping out', an increase from 8.4 per cent to 15 per cent. The authors concluded that:

...these results clearly indicate that men being released from prison are likely to obtain, and possibly remain in, worse accommodation after release than they lived in before arrest and that men who have tenuous or non-existent informal networks are particularly vulnerable (Corden et al.: 27).

Other studies have found that many prisoners do not have clear expectations of where they will be living on release from prison, with a majority having no fixed address to go to, or expecting to encounter problems finding accommodation (for example see Baldry 2001: 5; Carnaby 1998: 31). A similar situation has been found in the USA, where 43 per cent of female prisoners interviewed expected to be homeless on release (Lothian 1994).

At the same time, it is apparent that having access to appropriate accommodation is considered by ex-prisoners to be essential if they are to succeed in returning to the community. In a study of women released from prison in Victoria, 80 per cent saw accommodation as a major factor preventing them returning to prison (Carnaby: 57).

Providers of housing services to those exiting custody and researchers have identified a range of impediments and risk factors in accessing safe, secure, affordable and perhaps most importantly — appropriate — housing for ex-prisoners.

### Stigmatisation and discrimination

In attempting to return to the community, many ex-prisoners find their status as offenders or ex-prisoners leads to them experiencing stigmatisation and discrimination from other members of the community. Ex-prisoners may feel conscious that they are different from the rest of the community, perhaps alienated from it, and this is only reinforced when they are stigmatised by other members of the community who label ex-prisoners as offenders and do not see them as able to leave their offending behaviour behind them (Maruna & LeBel 2003). Stigmatisation and discrimination is particularly damaging when it comes from real estate agents, landlords or employers and leads to ex-prisoners finding it effectively impossible to secure private rental accommodation or employment. Landlords or real estate agents who conduct background checks will usually decline to rent to an applicant with a history of imprisonment (Petersilia 2003: 121) and ex-prisoners may find it difficult to explain gaps in their rental history or their lack of rental references and a credit rating without disclosing their imprisonment (Carnaby 1998: 58; Davis 2001: 14; Dutreix 2001: 23).

The effects of discrimination and stigmatisation can be cumulative, with a lack of accommodation making it harder for offenders to find employment, and a lack of employment affecting the capacity to secure private accommodation.



## Institutionalisation

The effects of institutionalisation can have highly deleterious consequences for the ability of individuals to adjust to living in non-institutional situations when they are released from prison. The prison environment can be highly rigid and controlled, with most decisions affecting the daily lives of prisoners taken from their control (Haney 2002). It is an environment where inmates are quarantined from the usual stresses and tensions of life on the outside (Winther 2003: 16). Prisoners are deprived of privacy and liberty, subjected to a diminished and stigmatised status and extremely sparse material conditions (Haney 2002: 4). The process of institutionalisation involves an adjustment of a prisoner's cognitions, emotions and behaviours to cope with life in this unnatural environment.

While not all prisoners will experience institutionalisation, or experience it in the same ways or to the same extent, many will make certain psychological adaptations to the prison environment. Some prisoners will become increasingly dependent on the institutional structure and reliant on the institution to make basic decisions for them (ibid.). This can result in impaired internal controls over the prisoner's own behaviour and the inability to make the kinds of decisions needed for daily living in the community.

In response to the dangers posed by the prison environment, prisoners may become hypervigilant and constantly alert for threats or risks (ibid.). This may also make the prisoner highly suspicious and distrustful. To preserve the appearance of 'toughness' that may be required to avoid exploitation in prison, prisoners may develop excessive control over their emotions and become emotionally alienated and distant from others around them. In a related way, prisoners may develop modes of self-imposed social withdrawal and isolation. A slightly different response is incorporation of the negative, exploitative norms inherent in the prison culture.

Prisoners typically live in cramped, stark places where they are denied basic rights to privacy and lose control over many of the most mundane aspects of their daily lives. In response to this, prisoners may develop problems with diminished self-esteem and personal regard (ibid.). In other cases, extreme prison conditions may result in the development of post-traumatic stress reactions. An ex-prisoner's acquired ability to mask his or her emotions may lead to the prisoner experiencing severe problems internally while presenting an outward appearance that suggests a positive adjustment to the community.

Just as the adaptations of institutionalisation take time to develop within the institution, so they take time to be lost once the person leaves the institution. Outside the prison, an ex-prisoner must try to redevelop those adaptations that are useful within the relatively unfettered environment he or she will encounter in the community. In many cases those adaptations that are practical for coping with life in an institutional environment, can operate negatively in the community. The inability to make basic decisions or develop positive relationships with housemates and support workers can lead to problems and conflicts that may result in illicit drug or alcohol abuse, offending behaviour and possibly loss of accommodation or return to prison. As Haney (2002) notes, these problems can be particularly marked for ex-prisoners with dependent children.

## Lack of social and life skills

Whether due to the effects of institutionalisation, or deficits that existed regardless of institutionalisation, many ex-prisoners lack basic life skills necessary for maintaining a legitimate place in the community, including maintaining a tenancy. Ex-prisoners may be deficient in areas such as budgeting and financial management, shopping, cooking and basic nutrition, opening and maintaining accounts for utilities such as telephone and electricity and day-to-day problem solving (Davis 2001: 15). Ex-prisoners may need support and assistance to develop these skills.

The effects of institutionalisation and the adaptations that must be made for prison life may be counter-productive for adaptation to the community in a variety of ways, including impacting on day-to-day social interactions (Davis 2001: 15). An ex-prisoner may have learned to be aggressive, manipulative and confrontational, or overly submissive and passive. The behaviours and interactions developed for prison life may not be appropriate or acceptable in the general community and can lead to conflict or rejection which may impact on the ability to secure accommodation and employment or develop positive social relationships. An ex-prisoner may need intensive support, perhaps in the form of mentoring or counselling, to develop ways of behaving and interacting that will help rather than hinder their return to the community.

## Lack of coping skills

As indicated earlier, the effects of institutionalisation can impair ex-prisoners' abilities to cope with everyday problems. A number of studies have demonstrated the deficits ex-prisoners have in coping and have shown the ineffective and sometimes destructive ways they approach problem solving (Travis, Solomon & Waul 2001: 19). Some ex-prisoners are not able to recognise problem situations or identify appropriate ways to respond to them which may lead to increased levels of stress and anxiety and in some instances anti-social or criminal responses (ibid.).

## Alcohol and other drug misuse issues

Many ex-prisoners find it difficult to refrain from drug use once they return to the community and this situation is exacerbated when they return to prior associations with people or places conducive to drug use (Carnaby 1998: 62–3). Ex-prisoners may also return to drug use as a familiar method for coping with stress (The Flat Out Collective 2003: 20). Expenditure on drugs and alcohol, and the lifestyle that tends to encompass drug and alcohol abuse, can undermine other efforts to maintain stable and ongoing accommodation (Hansen 2001: 18). In some cases alcohol and other drug use, especially if combined with resulting homelessness, can lead to re-offending and possibly a return to prison.

The stresses associated with trying to return to the community, particularly when stable accommodation is not readily available, together with accompanying problems of self-esteem and depression will lead some ex-prisoners to start, return to or increase drug use (Ogilvie 2001: 3). This may be especially so when those ex-prisoners who had previously been drug users may be returning to similar circumstances to those they experienced before being imprisoned. It has been estimated that two-thirds of

heroin users who have not received treatment will resume drug use and offending behaviour within three months of release from prison (Travis et al.: 26). Having a worsening heroin problem has been found to be the greatest predictor of an ex-prisoner's risk of returning to prison, alongside moving accommodation frequently (Baldry et al. 2003c: 19).

In the USA, 80 per cent of the state prison population has been found to have a history of drug and/or alcohol use, including 74 per cent of those expecting to be released in the following 12 months (Travis et al. 2001: 25). Approximately 38 per cent of violent offenders in US state prisons were drinking at the time of their offence, yet only 18 per cent received any alcohol-related treatment in prison (ibid.: 27).

At the same time, having access to stable and secure housing has been found to benefit heroin users in a variety of ways (Bessant et al. 2003: 55–56). Suitable housing can increase the health and wellbeing of heroin users by providing benefits such as better nutrition, adequate sleep and improved personal hygiene. Being homeless exposes heroin users to greater interaction with other users and the negative influences of a street environment. It typically requires injecting in unhygienic and public situations. Having suitable housing allows heroin users to look beyond 'survival mode' and become more future-oriented. Heroin users in stable accommodation are able to look at longer term issues such as employment, relapse prevention and rebuilding relationships.

### Intellectual and learning disabilities

While there is a limited amount of data available, Baldry (2001: 6) notes that what is known suggests an over-representation of ex-prisoners with an intellectual disability among the homeless.

### Homelessness prior to imprisonment

Australian data suggest that seven to eight per cent of male prisoners and 11 per cent of female prisoners were homeless or in highly insecure accommodation prior to imprisonment (Baldry 2001: 5). At the same time, 54 per cent of male and 62 per cent of female prisoners listed 'renting' as their living situation which, Baldry suggests, may mask intermittent homelessness or unstable housing.

### Housing-related debt

Ex-prisoners with a debt, which may or may not be housing related, are significantly more likely to return to prison than those with no debt (Baldry et al. 2003c: 14). Many ex-prisoners do not attempt to resolve housing debts as attempts to do so have failed in the past. Having housing related-debt can affect an individual's ability to secure long-term public housing, which has been shown to correlate with being able to stay out of prison (ibid.).

Housing arrears may accumulate while a person is in prison because of a failure to formally surrender private or public housing. This may be due to the offender, through the process of arrest and incarceration, not having the opportunity to make the necessary arrangements for closure of the tenancy (Davis 2001:14). Prisoners may also experience a loss of personal possessions whilst in custody because of prohibitively costly storage or an inability to protect personal effects if homes are

left empty. A person may be released from prison, even after a short sentence to find they have accumulated rental arrears, been removed from their tenancy and had almost all their possessions stolen or disposed of (ibid.). In these circumstances an offender may come out of prison and find he or she is faced with a very limited income, no home, large debts and none of the possessions necessary to establish a home and legitimate lifestyle in the community.

### Accumulated non-housing related debt

An accumulation of debt can affect an ex-prisoner's ability to establish a good credit rating and have the funds needed to maintain accommodation. It has been found that nearly 80 per cent of interviewed inmates had some level of debt when they went into prison (Begg 2001: 25). The most common debts were to government departments such as Centrelink and the Child Support Agency, banks or financial institutions and housing debts (for example Homersham & Grasevski 2003). Much of this debt appears to be the result of drug use and repeated instances of imprisonment can lead to spiralling levels of debt. It has been suggested (Begg 2001: 25) that prisoners should be given training in debt management and financial counselling while in prison to address their debt problems, a solution which would also assist ex-prisoners to better manage the limited finances available to them on release.

### Loss of previous accommodation during the term of custody

Accommodation held before a person is taken into custody may be lost due to an inability to maintain rental payments, leading to a loss of tenancy, or an inability to return to previous accommodation with family or friends due to relationship breakdowns (Carnaby 1998: 60). The loss of prior accommodation can be particularly difficult for individuals released after serving relatively short periods of time, up to three months or so, in remand custody or serving short sentences. This period of time may be long enough to result in the loss of accommodation, yet not long enough to be able to access programs or assistance in custody, or arrange accommodation support on release. Short prison terms carry a relatively high direct cost to the community, as the prisoner must go through all the same induction, assessment and classification as a long-term prisoner (Baldry et al. 2003c: 27). Short-term prisoners are unlikely to be able to participate in programs or receive other rehabilitative interventions within the prison, but are nonetheless exposed to the violence of the prison system and the danger posed by other inmates (ibid.).

Given the level of cost to the community and the individual that short periods in custody create, there is potentially a significant benefit to be gained by governments continuing to explore non-custodial alternatives for less serious offences.

### Lack of adequate funds to establish a home

Many ex-prisoners find it very difficult to get by financially, in the absence of accrued savings or financial help from family or friends. Those reliant on social security payments at the time of release find it difficult to manage their limited finances to secure any form of ongoing accommodation. This problem is exacerbated where individuals lack basic financial management and budgeting skills and if they use illicit

drugs. Even where an individual can find appropriate affordable accommodation they may not have the funds needed to establish a tenancy, such as funds for bond, rent in advance and security deposits for utilities such as electricity, gas and telephone (Carnaby 1998: 67). While assistance with meeting these costs may be available from public housing or community service organisations, individuals may be unaware this assistance is available or may not be able to access it during the critical first days after release from prison. Centrelink can provide a Crisis Payment equivalent to one weeks' additional entitlement (Homersham & Grasevski 2003: 3) but clients need to have the means to access this, and it will only go some way to helping.

Meeting the basic establishment costs of a tenancy may still mean that an ex-prisoner does not have money for whitegoods, furniture or other household items. As noted above, an ex-prisoner may have lost any possessions they did have during their time in custody. A lack of basic material infrastructure can contribute to an ex-prisoner's feelings of social isolation, alienation and low self-esteem.

### Worsening (contracting) of accommodation options with each custodial spell

Many offenders face a gradual deterioration of their housing conditions after release due to mounting debts, increased levels of family breakdown, stigma and discrimination, lack of support, lack of references, limited income and poor employment prospects (Conway 1999, cited in Baldry et al. 2003c: 5). For those incarcerated more than once, the extent and nature of those problems may increase with each period of imprisonment. The period of time since any stable rented housing was held may increase, further restricting the individual's capacity to provide an accommodation history acceptable to a real estate agent or landlord.

In a similar way, the prospects for employment are diminished and the individual becomes increasingly labelled as a criminal. Any family support that was available may be removed as families become increasingly unable to cope with the situation. Problems associated with institutionalisation and poor self-esteem are only likely to be exacerbated by each period spent in prison. Banks (1978, cited in Baldry et al. 2003d: 158) found evidence for this worsening of accommodation options, with her finding that the greater the number of times a person had been in prison, the more likely they were to be homeless on subsequent arrest.

### Type of offence committed

The available evidence suggests that the type of offence for which a prisoner was convicted and sentenced does not appear to have a relationship to the likelihood of them being homeless after release (see Rough Sleepers Unit 2000). There is some evidence to suggest that stable accommodation, which has been shown to be important for reducing the risk of re-offending in all offenders, can be particularly important for sex offenders (Scottish Executive Justice Department 2001: 19). The supervision of sex offenders and their ability to benefit from community-based treatment programs can be seriously undermined if they do not have a settled address (ibid.) though this is not necessarily a unique situation for this type of offender.

There is some documentary as well as anecdotal evidence to suggest that sex offenders may be more likely than many other offenders to be denied accommodation by landlords or service providers such as local housing authorities if the nature of their offences are known (Cowan et al. 1999). Service providers may have difficulty placing sex offenders in hostels or shared accommodation because of the possibility of recriminations from other residents (Scottish Executive Justice Department: 19) and this may have an impact on agency resources. Sex offenders may also experience harassment through vigilante action forcing them out of their homes (Cowan et al.).

In the USA some federally subsidised housing providers may, and in some cases are required to, deny housing to people with a criminal history involving drugs or violence (Rodriguez & Brown 2003: 3).

While the period of time a person is in custody can have influence whether they have accommodation available on release other factors relating to the person, such as lack of support and substance misuse problems, seem to be far greater risk factors for homelessness than the type of offence committed. There is little evidence available on the relationship between offence committed and homelessness and there is some scope for this relationship to be explored.

### Social isolation and lack of support

Many ex-prisoners come to be socially isolated and alienated from others in the first weeks after their release from prison (for example Carnaby 1998: 56). This response seems closely linked to a lack of support from friends, family or support workers and can also be tied to not having clear goals and a support plan as well as a lack of stable on-going accommodation. Consistent and reliable support emerges as a major factor influencing whether recently released prisoners are able to begin to make the changes necessary for a successful return to the community (Carnaby 1998: 61).

### Relationships with family

Periods of time spent away due to incarceration, as well as the behaviour that led to the incarceration, can make it difficult for ex-prisoners to re-engage with family members which may lead to low self-esteem and depression and contribute to difficulties securing accommodation (Hansen 2001: 18).

In some cases people released from custody may find they have to return to a dysfunctional family environment as they have no other accommodation options. This is particularly so for women in violent relationships and young people who may have to return to a violent and abusive household (Hansen 2001: 18). Hagan and McCarthy (1997: 25–31) found very high levels of physical, sexual and emotional abuse from parents among youth living on the streets. They also found that many of the youths had come from families where the parents abused drugs and alcohol and where problems in school had resulted in inadequate education (1997: 32–35).

The importance of maintaining positive family relationships is indicated by the finding that former prisoners who are able to live with parents or family are significantly less likely to return to prison than those living with friends, acquaintances or alone (Baldry et al. 2003c: 13).

## Relationships with children and issues of domestic violence

Many ex-prisoners can find it difficult to maintain positive relationships with their families and this is particularly so for women with dependent children. Many ex-prisoners will have had difficult family relationships before their imprisonment and many others find their offending and imprisonment negatively impacts on relationships with family. Women are frequently isolated from their children while in prison, given inadequate visiting opportunities and removed from decision-making and care-giving (Carnaby 1998: 13). Research shows that incarceration of a mother can lead to emotional, financial and social suffering for children and that the experience of incarceration can permanently damage mother and child relationships (Travis, Solomon & Waul 2001: 13).

Women in situations of accommodation and other crisis may find structural barriers to obtaining support. Many domestic violence shelters exclude people with drug problems and many hostels exclude women with children (Ogilvie 2001b: 16). Female ex-prisoners with dependent children may find it difficult to become reunited with their children after release and their ability to find stable on-going accommodation may be a determining factor in whether they are able to have children live with them (Carnaby: 65–66).

As discussed in an earlier section on the social disadvantages facing the homeless generally, domestic violence is a major cause of homelessness among women. Domestic violence is on the one level very much a criminal justice issue and there is a link in this sense between offending, imprisonment and domestic violence leading to homelessness. The precise nature of this link is not clear though. It seems likely that a significant proportion of ex-prisoners will have issues with anger management and use of violence and a number of these people will have been imprisoned for acts involving violence, possibly domestic violence. It is also likely that the institutionalisation effects of imprisonment may lead to some ex-prisoners being more violent than they were before, especially given the ongoing exposure to violence and the functional role of violence in the prison environment.

Some anecdotal evidence of a possible role for imprisonment in increasing domestic violence can be found through on-line sites that allow the wives and partners of serving prisoners to give and seek advice on a self-help basis. An examination of one such site, 'Prison Talk Online' ([www.prisontalk.com](http://www.prisontalk.com)) shows message threads from a number of wives or partners who have experienced violence from recently released prisoners or are fearful because their husband or partner is due for release. The messages and responses show a belief amongst these intimate partners that the experience of prison makes men more likely to be violent when released, at least during the first days and weeks as they are adjusting to their return to the community.

If the anecdotal evidence found through 'Prison Talk Online' is valid, it suggests a relationship between imprisonment, ex-prisoner status and homelessness. In this case it is not the ex-prisoner who faces an increased risk of homelessness, but their intimate partner and children. There is a need for empirical research to investigate whether domestic violence perpetrated by recently-released prisoners can lead to

increased homeless among women and children and whether there is a role for SAAP in helping to bring about programs to address this situation.

### Inability to access the private rental market

Australian capital cities and many regional areas have seen substantial increases in rental costs in recent years and very low vacancy levels. In many places, particularly inner city areas, low cost boarding houses or cheap private accommodation has been redeveloped leaving deficits in affordable housing for those on restricted incomes (Davis 2001: 13).

Many ex-prisoners are denied access to the private rental market because of practical difficulties (lack of funds for a rental bond) or discrimination because of past experiences with the private rental market (e.g. rental 'black list'). Ex-prisoners face a strong possibility of being denied access to private rental accommodation if they elect to disclose their criminal record and difficulties accounting for the gap in their rental history if they do not disclose their record (Dutreix 2001: 23). Ex-prisoners may have a poor or bad rental history stemming from prior problems such as drug or alcohol addiction, gambling or domestic violence (Davis 2001: 14).

### Lack of social housing stock

Shortages in available public and community housing stock can lead to long waiting lists for those available properties. The public housing waiting list across Australia has been estimated to be 100,000 families or 250,000 individuals, with the queue growing by 12 people a day (Healey 2002). Generally only those people able to meet the criteria for priority housing have any realistic prospect of being able to secure public housing, certainly in the short- to medium-term (Dutreix 2001: 22; Hansen 2001: 18), with waiting lists for most applicants being several years. In the major capital cities waiting lists for applicants not eligible for priority housing can be up to 10 years (Davis 2001: 13). Even applicants assessed as the highest priority for urgent housing may have to wait up to two years to be housed (Dutreix 2003: 11).

Changes in public housing policies may make eligibility criteria for priority housing tighter or difficult to satisfy, meaning that ex-prisoners may not be able to access priority housing (Carnaby 1998: 68–9; Dutreix 2001: 22). While community housing stock is increasing in many areas, this may be at the detriment of public housing as properties may be transferred from public housing stocks to community housing (Dutreix 2003: 11). The problem can be exacerbated for prisoners who may experience removal from waiting lists whilst in custody because of a failure to adhere to bureaucratic requirements. This is commonly due to 'no contact' where the housing agency has written to a serving prisoner at a previous address and received no response leading to removal from the list (Davis 2001: 14). Prisoners are not aware they have been removed and it may be a considerable time before they are able to rejoin the list, usually beginning again at the bottom. Mechanisms that prevent serving prisoners being removed from waiting lists could provide significantly better outcomes in some cases.

Linked to shortages in public and community housing stock, social service workers note that there is not enough supported housing or progressive, flexible housing



models providing positive environments that cater to the needs of marginalised people. Winther (2003: 16) notes this is a particular problem for young people who may have deeply troubled backgrounds and complex needs and that his support service is continually unable to respond to the level of demand from young people seeking safe shelter on their release. Similar problems are faced by services working with other sections of the target group (for example see Dutreix 2001: 22; Dutreix 2003: 11; Hansen 2001).

The importance of providing appropriate support services emerges as a very strong theme in the literature (see Baldry 2001: 7; Baldry et al. 2003c: 15; Carnaby 1998: 61; Dutreix 2003: 12; Winther 2003: 16). Clients who receive support they regard as 'helpful' are markedly less likely to return to prison than clients receiving support they consider 'unhelpful' (Baldry et al. 2003c: 15). Being able to access support which is flexible and able to respond to individual needs for accommodation and other forms of assistance is essential to the success of many individuals' efforts to successfully return to the community. The support also needs to provide a continuum from dependant, institutional care, through emergency and transitional accommodation to self-sufficiency (Dutreix 2003: 13). The problems and challenges faced by ex-prisoners can be almost impossible for the individual to surmount without some form of dedicated support. The absence of support for even a short period immediately following release can contribute to the individual undertaking behaviours that can lead to re-offending or a loss of any accommodation the individual has been able to secure.

### Inappropriate housing types and locations

Ex-prisoners' attempts to return to the community may be hampered by an inability to access housing that is deemed appropriate and beneficial to reintegration by prisoners themselves. While it is critical that there are sufficient accommodation options available for ex-prisoners to be placed appropriately, it is also vital that ex-prisoners have sufficient accommodation choices to be able to *avoid* certain accommodation situations, such as:

- ▶ geographic areas associated with drug use (for example Carnaby 1998: 59 & 63), or ill-equipped to provide needed supports;
- ▶ institutional-like hostels that can prevent the development of independent living skills and will often ensure ongoing contact with other ex-prisoners and possibly with current offenders (Carlisle 1996); and
- ▶ having to share with others when independent housing would be more suited to an individual's needs (Carnaby 1998: 59)

Many ex-prisoners find themselves living in hostels or boarding houses as they have little alternative. These types of facilities can provide cheap accommodation and a form of stability when there is often nothing else available. In some cases hostels and boarding houses can be detrimental to an ex-prisoner's prospects of successfully returning to the community and can contribute to re-offending. Paylor (1995: 38) notes that some hostels and boarding houses can perpetuate the experience of imprisonment. These types of accommodation tend to be occupied to a large extent

by people with substance abuse problems, mental health issues and often contain a high proportion of ex-prisoners. These residents often expose each other to threats or temptations of re-offending. The relatively confined nature of these residences and the need to share basic facilities can seem to some occupants little different to the prison environment and can create stresses and tensions that can result in violence, depression and a perpetuation of offending and substance abuse.

Not all hostels and boarding houses are negative environments however (Paylor: 38). Those that are well managed and provide access to support can provide an affordable and relatively secure housing option and may tend to attract a resident population that is more conducive to living and quiet and non-offending lifestyle. Boarding houses often include a proportion of people who have jobs and temporary overseas or local visitors who are not experiencing problems such as substance abuse or homelessness but are simply desirous of cheap, short-term accommodation (Chamberlain 1999: 21). Drawing on US experience highlights models of boarding housings which provide positive support and activities including recreational activities, mental health support, mixed forms of accommodation to cater to short or medium-term needs and which operate under staffing models that encourage and facilitate positive behaviour change and positive adaptations to community living (see McDonald 1994: 17–28). Many boarding houses in Australia could be improved by the application of funding to provide better management, various forms of transitional accommodation within the one residence, on-site clinical services, substance abuse programs and to facilitate outreach support (ibid.: 29–31).

Beyond simply allowing ex-prisoners to have greater self-determination or live more comfortably, the capacity to make these kinds of choices has been shown to be critical to the individual's prospects for successful community integration. Ex-prisoners who consider their accommodation suitable are significantly less likely to return to prison than those who consider it unsuitable:

...ex-prisoners' own estimation of the suitability of their accommodation is a very reliable guide to whether it is and whether they return to prison (Baldry et al. 2003c: 15).

International studies have shown that housing specifically allocated to ex-prisoners, or available to ex-prisoners, tends to be highly concentrated in particular areas (see Baldry et al. 2003c: 5). In the USA a very high proportion of released prisoners return to a relatively small number of areas within cities or major regional centres (see Travis et al.: 41). Other research suggests that a disproportionately high number of offenders come from a small number of neighbourhoods in particular cities, with an estimated one-eighth of adult males in certain Brooklyn, New York neighbourhoods having been incarcerated in a single year (ibid.). Despite differences in racial make-ups and policing practices between the USA and Australia, similar patterns have been observed locally, with a majority of ex-prisoners in New South Wales and, to a lesser extent Victoria, found to come from and return to a very small number of clustered suburbs and towns (Baldry et al. 2003c: 20).

In both the US and Australian situations these 'offender rich' areas are places experiencing very low socio-economic status and social disadvantage on many

levels. This finding strongly suggests the need for governments to concentrate services and resources in those same areas as well as provide options to allow ex-prisoners greater opportunities to relocate to more suitable areas.

### Lack of pre-release assistance or support

Many people leave prison unprepared for a successful return to the community. They may have poor access to, or inadequate information about, housing options or forms of support and assistance. There may be substantial difficulties for community service providers trying to access prisoners pre-release (Hansen 2001: 19) with corrective services personnel sometimes being reluctant to assist community service providers in accessing prisoners or providing information for them. As will be discussed in more detail later, if service providers are able to establish relationships and undertake assessments with serving prisoners they are better able to secure the prisoner's cooperation and trust, are able to determine the most appropriate forms of support and can plan for these to be in place at the time of release.

For some recently released prisoners, not having proper identification or documentation such as birth certificates or a drivers licence can make it difficult to access forms of assistance such as Centrelink payments or medical treatment under Medicare (Homersham & Grasevski 2003: 2). Many prisoners lose access to these documents while in prison and may leave prison without the ability to satisfy government agencies or financial institutions of their identity. This issue has also been highlighted in a US study that considered aspects of pre-release planning that could make a significant difference to the lives of recently released prisoners (Nelson, Deess & Allen 1999: 29).

Providing support though can be hampered by logistical difficulties in arranging for housing pre-release because of uncertain release dates (Baldry et al. 2003c: 6), inability to inspect properties, or limited access to telephone facilities. There can also be difficulties for prisoners in accessing the few dedicated or specialist prisoner accommodation services that exist in Australia. This is not assisted by a lack of coordination between relevant services, in some places, when better communication between government and community agencies could significantly reduce frustration and marginalisation among those needing support (Begg 2001: 25).

There is also a reticence among ex-prisoners to approach service providers and seek assistance after release. Baldry et al. (2003b: 14) found a marked reticence amongst ex-prisoners, particularly in NSW, to use services other than Centrelink, with very few even considering seeking help or support to claim housing rights. This contributed to most NSW prisoners studied being in insecure and marginal housing arrangements arranged on a weekly or even daily basis. Hagan and McCarthy (1997: 83) found that the use of social services by youths living on the streets was limited and inconsistent. Rodriguez and Brown (2003: 9–10) found that programmatic assumptions that homeless ex-prisoners would ask for and accept support were not always valid and a proportion of prisoners in their New York-based program preferred to navigate their own way through housing shelters or try and find accommodation with family or friends rather than accept help they originally requested.



## 5. Homelessness and offending

As with the preceding discussions of homelessness and post-release issues in general, not all returning prisoners uniformly experience personal and structural barriers to accommodation.

These characteristics attributed to prisoners in the above sections do not describe all prisoners: just as individuals who find themselves homeless are heterogeneous, so prisoners cannot be seen as a single invariant group. Not all prisoners experience multiple levels of social disadvantage and not all prisoners face barriers finding accommodation post-release. That said, the experience of incarceration can compound existing difficulties for many prisoners, creating disadvantages that are the 'collateral consequences' of imprisonment because they occur beyond any crime prevention effects of prison (see Tonry & Petersilia 1999). These consequences have been observed in various jurisdictions around the world.

The disadvantages faced by the homeless population and by ex-prisoners, especially those also experiencing homelessness, can contribute to offending behaviour. Being homeless is a risk factor for involvement in offending, as is having previously been imprisoned. Of course, no single disadvantage or combination of disadvantages will inevitably lead to initial offending and subsequent re-offending. To couch this in the same terms as the discussion of homelessness, trigger events may act upon welfare needs, in the absence of protective factors, to lead to criminal behaviour. Studies have shown strong links between homelessness and offending behaviour.

There are significant social and economic costs associated with individuals becoming homeless (see below; also Neil & Fopp 1994). These costs can include increased crime: international research has shown that being homeless can create a situation in which people may be more likely to commit criminal offences and being homeless can even serve as a criminogenic factor directly leading to re-offending (e.g. McCarthy & Hagan 1991; Hagan & McCarthy 1997). One of Hagan and McCarthy's (1997: 133) most telling findings was that street youth in Toronto, Canada were less involved in crime and less frequently arrested and detained than street youth in Vancouver, Canada. The authors attributed this difference to greater levels of social support available in Toronto, compared to those found in Vancouver which placed a greater emphasis on crime control than social intervention.

As well as noting that ex-prisoners may be particularly vulnerable to homelessness, it has been shown that levels of arrest and incarceration are much higher in homeless people than in the general population (McCarthy & Hagan 1991: 397). As noted earlier, homeless people are relatively likely to be in situations where tensions such as the need to survive or negative influences from other people can lead to criminal offending. The need to obtain money to satisfy drug habits, or to obtain food, accommodation or basic material goods may be a significant factor behind the finding that homeless people are much more likely to be arrested for property crimes or substance-related offences than for crimes involving violence (McCarthy & Hagan: 397).

Carlisle's (1996) study of 175 prisoners, with follow-up interviews with 61 ex-prisoners at four and eight months after release, found that two-thirds of ex-prisoners who had no satisfactory accommodation re-offended within twelve months of release, whereas only a quarter of those with good accommodation did so.

De Lisi (2000: 61) studied 100 'homeless' jail inmates and 100 'domiciled' jail inmates in Colorado. He defined 'homeless' inmates as those without a physical domicile for more than a year prior to arrest and 'domiciled' inmates as those with a domicile for at least a year prior to arrest. Notably, De Lisi found that 82 per cent of homeless inmates reported chronic homelessness for the entirety of their adult lives, while only four per cent of domiciled inmates had ever experienced a period of homelessness and none of them had ever experienced a period of chronic homelessness. De Lisi (2000: 65) also found that homeless inmates had significantly more extensive criminal histories than domiciled inmates. The average homeless inmate had nearly 19 prior arrests, with a maximum of 108, while the average domiciled inmate had four prior arrests, with a maximum of 26. Homeless inmates were much more likely to have been arrested for 'nuisance' offences such as possessing alcohol in public or public intoxication, vagrancy and indecent exposure (De Lisi 2000: 64). While this is not a surprising finding given that homeless people are far more likely to be in situations of public visibility than those with homes, it nonetheless indicates a higher level of involvement of homeless people in the criminal justice system which can lead to an exacerbation of disadvantage. De Lisi (2000: 65) also found that homeless inmates were much more likely to have been arrested for property offences, while a majority of domiciled inmates had been arrested for traffic offences such as drink-driving.

This is consistent with Banks and Fairhead's earlier (1976: 12) finding of a much higher degree of homelessness among 'petty' offenders compared with other offenders in the UK prison system. Banks and Fairhead also found (1976: 17) a far higher rate of reconviction among homeless petty offenders compared with other petty offenders and found homeless offenders were more likely to be serving an activated suspended sentence concurrent with or consecutive to their current sentence.

Entering an unstable housing situation appears to be a risk factor for experiencing further deteriorations in housing and increasing the possibility of recidivism. Baldry et al. (2003c: 11) found that 59 per cent of ex-prisoners who moved more than twice in a three month period returned to prison, while only 22 per cent who had moved once or not at all had been re-incarcerated. As the authors note, moving a number of times in a short period is indicative of homelessness, particularly where their subjects generally indicated that they moved because they had to, rather than because they chose to.

Dutreix (2001: 22) has noted that women, and the same applies to men, may find themselves having to stay with friends who are actively involved in illicit drug use, and the women may find themselves being drawn back into that lifestyle. To avoid this situation, or avoid having to live on the streets, women may have to return to abusive relationships or accept accommodation in circumstances where they have to compromise themselves to maintain the accommodation, such as by providing sexual favours. Living in these circumstances is even more problematic for women with dependent children. As Dutreix puts it:

...some of these options do at least provide a roof overhead but they are not safe and secure and certainly do not ensure that the woman's human rights are not being violated.

Understanding the direction of the relationship between criminal behaviour and homelessness can be difficult:

Homelessness may be the worst single difficulty affecting the ex-offender, but it is important to recognise that causal links between homelessness and re-offending are not absolutely clear-cut. Persistent offenders are often handicapped by a whole range of social, psychological and medical difficulties, which undoubtedly complicates the whole question of homelessness and crime (Ramsay 1986: 59).

While some studies conclude that homelessness causes crime, others have found that homelessness does not lead to crime, rather that crime leads to homelessness (see McCarthy & Hagan 1991: 395). It appears that the direction of the relationship will vary for certain people at certain points in time. Some people may become homeless due to criminal behaviour which leads to problems such as incarceration, loss of family and other close relationships and difficulties with maintaining a tenancy. Other people may find themselves homeless for other reasons and then find themselves being drawn into criminal behaviour as a result of their homeless situation, perhaps through the need to survive or pressure to offend from other people in their environment.

For many people who become homeless and have a criminal record, homelessness and offending may act on each other bi-directionally so that the experience of being homeless leads to offending behaviour, while offending and incarceration leads to an exacerbation of homelessness and exclusion from society. McCarthy and Hagan's (1991) finding that the level of criminality amongst homeless adolescents increases with the amount of time they have been homeless suggests a range of possibilities. These include a diminishing of social controls, increased socialisation by deviant peers, labelling and therefore increased police attention or simply that the need to take more drastic measures to survive increases in line with the greater levels of deprivation that accompany more time spent living on the streets.

An important related point is that offenders who are homeless or do not have stable and secure accommodation may be treated more harshly by the justice system than other offenders (see Scottish Executive Justice Department 2001: 17). Accused offenders who cannot offer an appropriate address are more likely to be remanded in custody than granted bail. Convicted offenders may be denied parole if they cannot put forward a post-release plan that includes accommodation acceptable to the parole board. In these cases homelessness and offending behaviour may not be directly related, but a person's homelessness may result in them being held in custody when they might otherwise have been released into the community.

Not all studies examining homelessness and offending have found clear relationships between the two. Zapf, Roesch and Hart (1996: 438) in a study of 790 individuals in a pre-trial detention centre in Vancouver, Canada found no significant differences between the homeless and the non-homeless in the nature of their offending. Both

groups were equally as likely to have been convicted of a range of offence types including violent crime, property crime, drug-defined crime and miscellaneous offences. The homeless were however significantly more likely to have had a juvenile criminal history and more likely to have an adult criminal record. There were no differences between the two groups in terms of the number of previous incarcerations.

There is still much to be discovered about the way social and economic disadvantage interacts to influence contacts with the criminal justice system, and how this in turn interacts with accommodation, employment and other factors linked to social inclusion and equity.

The associations are complex and far from straightforward however, and given that many prisoners are beset by multiple disadvantages, addressing problem areas in isolation will probably fail to make a long-term impact on recidivism. In order to break the cycle of re-offending, prisoners need to be *reintegrated* into mainstream society, to have their multiple disadvantages addressed, to participate fully as community members, and to benefit from that participation. There will inevitably be a cost involved in providing the means to address these disadvantages and in many cases the cost will be a substantial one. Nonetheless, these costs must be balanced against the very high direct and indirect costs to the community, the criminal justice system and the government of people re-offending and being returned to prison.



## 6. The benefits of intervening to promote reintegration and prevent homelessness

‘I think that society says that if you break the law you go to prison, well fair enough, but what happens when all the prisoners are released from prison. You the government put us away and when you feel like it let us out. But then you don’t let us re-establish ourselves. I feel the more you send people to prison and then you do not help us when we get out then the more that people will find themselves at the point of re-offending as they have no other way to survive on the outside...Do you think that every person that gets out of prison has a loving family and loads of support WAKE UP this is only a fairytale’ (Case Study 1; Hansen 2001: 21).

‘Just as there is a sense in which offenders are sent to prison as a symbolic gesture on behalf of society, so too the provision of accommodation has its intangible as well as its tangible value. Even the mere availability of such help marks the offering of an olive branch, and may do something to reduce the ex-prisoner’s sense of bitterness, which can be a valuable gain in itself’ (Ramsay 1986: 59).

There are benefits for the whole Australian community in ensuring individuals have access to adequate housing. Cross-sectional survey research conducted by Mullins and Western (2001) examined links between housing and nine key socio-cultural indicators. They looked at groups in different forms of housing tenure — public housing, private tenancy with government rent assistance, low income and other private tenants not receiving rent assistance and those who owned or were purchasing their homes. The authors compared these tenure groups on the basis of poverty, labour force participation, crime, social exclusion, community, perceived well-being, anomie, health and education. Mullins and Western (2000: 27) found that public housing tenants, followed by low-income private tenants on government benefits, were the most disadvantaged of the tenure groups. They concluded that while the receipt of government assistance may have positive outcomes and may lessen the extent of disadvantage, it did not serve to pull people out of their disadvantaged circumstances. More than just housing and financial assistance were needed to address fundamental disadvantages.

This should not discount the indirect social and economic benefits of government housing assistance: research modelling the impact of housing assistance<sup>6</sup> in Australia over a person’s lifetime and across accommodation and non-accommodation outcomes, particularly education and employment opportunities, suggested that benefits accrue to both individuals and the government. These benefits can far outweigh any direct costs of the initial assistance (King 2002).

A number of studies in various Western nations have sought to determine the benefits of intervention in economic terms. A systematic review of published studies found that the provision of stable housing to the homeless may result in substantial savings in related non-accommodation areas, with housing costs sometimes

6 Specifically, Commonwealth rent assistance

completely offset by the savings in other areas (Berry et al. 2003). These studies have identified savings and economic benefits on a number of indicators, such as savings for the criminal justice system from housing the homeless, reduced mental health and substance abuse costs and reduced public health expenditure (ibid.: 12–13).

One Australian study found the total cost of youth homelessness in Australia to be \$574 million, with the net benefit of successfully intervening to be \$474 million (ibid.). The benefits to individuals and society from completed schooling and enhanced lifetime productivity have been found to clearly outweigh the costs of keeping homeless youth at school (ibid.). Other studies have found significant cost benefits from improved employment prospects from housing the homeless, both through increased productive output, and reduced government expenditure on unemployment benefits (ibid.).

Multiple benefits can be derived from addressing the post-release challenges faced by prisoners. By helping offenders make the transition to mainstream community life, the likelihood of them re-offending can be reduced, as acknowledged by the ex-offender quoted in Hansen (2001). There are also more symbolic benefits, as remarked upon by Ramsay: assisting offenders' entrée into community life through access to adequate housing shows that society is a willing participant in the process of reintegration; and that an individual ex-prisoner's efforts are supported, that the punishment process is complete, the associated stigma is lifted, and the process of social inclusion begun.

The costs of crime amount to more than the value of property lost or damaged. There is the emotional impact on victims and their families, the costs of progress through the criminal justice system, the costs of incarceration, and the costs associated with ongoing individual and intergenerational criminality because current criminal justice interventions do not stop all re-offending. These costs are difficult to estimate, and the task becomes near impossible when one attempts to factor in the costs flowing on from the collateral consequences of imprisonment (such as ongoing health care, unemployment and other welfare supports, measures to address family breakdown and homelessness, etc.). One indicator of the benefits of addressing crime through reducing homelessness is by observing the cost of holding an individual in prison, which costs between \$45,000 and \$100,000 per year depending on the level of security (Baldry et al.: 26). At the same time, supported accommodation for an ex-prisoner has been estimated to cost between \$20,000 (non-intensive support) and \$35,000 (24 hour a day support) per year (ibid.).

In providing support and accommodation, and encouraging reintegration rather than just reduced re-offending, there are substantial benefits to the community beyond increased safety.

Given the intertwined nature of appropriate housing, non-accommodation welfare needs, and offending, relevant authorities are engaging in various strategies to address issues of homelessness and reintegration. These are discussed below.

## 7. Policy and programs addressing reintegration and homelessness

### Policy directions around the world

#### United Kingdom

A significant and highly visible increase in street homelessness during the late 1980s and early 1990s, apparently resulting from changes in welfare policy, led to a concentrated policy effort to address homelessness in the United Kingdom (Anderson 2001: 9). The principal policy response was establishment of the Rough Sleepers Initiative, primarily in central London and Scotland. Implementation of this initiative contributed strongly to the recognition that addressing homelessness involved the coordinated efforts of a diverse range of agencies.

Applied more specifically, there has evolved a recognition that in order to ameliorate re-offending and homelessness, prisoners' individual needs must be met in a timely, tailored and culturally appropriate fashion. For instance, the Scottish Executive Justice Department poses a model of offender accommodation in which individually tailored support and supervision is provided to offenders on the basis of assessed risk. Accommodation options for needy offenders range from hostel, to private rental accompanied by necessary supports. Just as accommodation support is tailored for individuals, so surveillance, supervision and non-accommodation supports are tailored and regularly reviewed, with the aim of promoting independent living to enhance community safety. Specific measures have been inbuilt to ensure adequate supports are given to prisoners with special and complex needs (see Scottish Executive Justice Department 2001).

The complexity of the issues confronting returning prisoners, coupled with the aim of reintegration and social inclusion rather than just reduced re-offending necessitate whole of government responding. In addition to the portfolios of custodial and community corrections and housing, collaborative policy approaches also draw in portfolios as diverse as health, education, workplace planning, social benefits administration, and police. Naturally the expertise and existing services of non-government agencies are also drawn into this joint working approach. Recommendations made to the UK government about correctional responses to homelessness (Rough Sleepers Unit 2000) include:

- ▶ assessment of housing status and related risk factors at prison reception;
- ▶ targeting prisoners at risk of homelessness;
- ▶ linking prisoners to employment programs;
- ▶ providing information and advice to prisoners in an appropriate form;
- ▶ working closely with, and referring prisoners to, specialist, voluntary, non-government service providers;
- ▶ working closely with local housing authorities to ensure appropriate policies and provide liaison with the private housing sector; and

- ▶ imprisoning people in their local area to ensure relationships are maintained.

While such approaches may be deemed ‘correctional’ and be driven by the corrections portfolio, it is clear that corrections must adopt a collaborative approach and work with other government and non-government agencies to achieve these outcomes.

Much of the policy thinking in the UK and Europe in recent years has been informed by social inclusion/exclusion theory. This approach suggests that structural and personal factors, generally associated with debt, lead to certain groups and individuals being separated from social interaction and the benefits available to others in society (Baldry et al. 2003d: 156). The factors typically regarded as contributing to social inclusion or exclusion are employment opportunities, geographical location, educational opportunities, mental illness and a safe and secure family context (ibid.).

The significance of the social exclusion approach becomes apparent when one considers that these emerge as the same factors that have been shown to characterise both the prison population and the homeless population. Indeed, the lack of affordable and secure housing is regarded as one of the primary factors contributing to social exclusion. Those in prison or detention, and those recently released from prison to be amongst the most socially excluded members of society and among the most unlikely to become integrated into communities (Jones, Finer & Nellis 1998).

Hence, Baldry et al. (2003d: 60) have noted that post-release policy in the UK and Europe has sought to address both systemic and individual matters, focussing on:

- ▶ integrating support and services to address issues of housing, drug rehabilitation and employment;
- ▶ addressing stigmatisation and discrimination through building trust and support in the community, especially with employers; and
- ▶ providing pre-release resettlement services.

### United States of America

In the USA, there has tended to be a focus on individual employment programmes as the answer to post-release problems, though this varies from one state to another (Baldry et al. 2003 c: 160; Finn 1998a; Finn 1999). These programs often involve components of training, education and related support as well as direct assistance with accessing employment and may involve pre-release support and assessment (Finn 1998b). This has been despite a review which indicated that levels of employment were no different amongst ex-prisoners who had participated in employment programs than in those who had not (Finn 1998c). If successful, employment programs can help to address disadvantage and social exclusion on various levels, particularly by giving ex-prisoners an income from which they can better pursue stable and secure accommodation and move away from poverty and welfare dependence. Employment can also bring improved self-esteem and develop social skills through giving the ex-prisoner a more positive and appropriate peer group.

In the USA, the *Public Safety Ex-Offender Self-Sufficiency Act* recently introduced to (but not yet, at the time of writing, passed by) the US Congress, acknowledges the critical role housing plays in recidivism, and aims to encourage offenders' ability to access housing. Specifically, tax credits will be used to encourage the development of supported transitional housing for those who have been convicted, by states, local areas, developers and other voluntary organisations. It also explicitly acknowledges that housing issues are only one aspect of successful reintegration, and job training and other supports are needed to assist the successful transition to community life (Davis 2003).

### New Zealand

In New Zealand, the Department of Corrections has recognised the importance of adequately preparing inmates for release and reintegration to the community (New Zealand Department of Corrections 2002: 17). The Department has established self-care units for prisoners nearing release. In these units the inmates take responsibility for budgeting, food ordering and preparation, cleaning, laundry and co-operative decision making and the general responsibilities that come with daily living. The Department contends that this approach helps to bridge the gap between the prison environment and the community environment.

Perhaps most reassuring is the fact that current thinking about the means of positively impacting upon homelessness tallies well with good practice in the delivery of post-release services to prisoners. Table 2 describes the current trends in post-release and homelessness policies, illustrating areas of shared thinking.<sup>7</sup>

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7 For detailed information, see Baldry & Maplestone 2002; Murphy Healey 1999; National Audit Office 2002; Rough Sleepers Unit 2001; Social Exclusion Unit 2002; Talbot & Scott 1996; US General Accounting Office 2001

Table 2: Current international trends in post-release and homelessness policy approaches

POLICY APPROACH	Preventing Homelessness	Promoting Reintegration
<b>SERVICE DELIVERY ETHOS</b>		
<b>Partnerships</b>		
• interagency/intersectoral: whole-of-government response, ideally coordinated at highest levels & implemented organisation wide	3	3
• government & non-government: coordinating whole of government actions with the community /voluntary/private sector	3	3
<b>Stakeholder input:</b> into the policy development process	3	Partial
<b>Dedicated funding:</b> long-term funding to allow for long-term responses & to convert pilots into programs	3	3
<b>Addressing the client/consumer holistically:</b> considering & addressing multiple disadvantages & challenges	3	3
<b>Flexibility of client options:</b> a range of interventions appropriate to differing client needs, spanning a support-independence continuum	3	3
<b>Client empowerment:</b> encouraging clients to actively participate in service provision when able & valuing client input to policy development	3	Partial
<b>Respecting clients' rights:</b> with rights codified & guiding service provision	3	6
<b>Developing client independence:</b> encouraging clients to actively participate in community life to the best of their capabilities, using graduated supports	3	3
<b>Developing client responsibility:</b> encouraging clients to accept responsibility for their past actions & future conduct	6	3
<b>Developing staff skills:</b> to ensure that workers can meet specialist client needs	3	3
<b>Prevention:</b> actively intervening to identify & negate problems before they develop; stopping people from embarking on detrimental pathways	3	6
<b>Early intervention:</b> actively intervening to identify & negate problems that indicate a risk of following a negative pathway to its logical conclusion	3	3
<b>IMPLEMENTATION</b>		
<b>Client assessment</b>		
• formal & standardised: a system-wide instrument that allows uniform assessment of risk	6	3
• informal: professional expertise guides assessment of risk	3	6

<b>Client input to individual services:</b> linked to client empowerment; specifically considering the needs, goals & desires of clients	3	3
<b>Case planning &amp; management:</b> coordinating the delivery of disparate services from a single point & planning for movement through the system & exit from the system. May involve brokerage & referral if necessary.	3	3
<b>Separating support from bureaucratic requirements:</b> ensuring that one is not contingent on the other. In the case of homelessness, this is a separation of support & housing management; in post-release terms, it is the separation of support & surveillance/supervision functions.	3	Debated
<b>Continuum of care/throughcare:</b> following the client through the system, to ensure gaps are plugged and services are continuous	3	3
<b>Tangible targets:</b> setting quantifiable, outcome-based goals for implemented policy	3	3
<b>Information management:</b> implementing computerised system to facilitate client tracking through the system	3	3
<b>Formal program evaluation:</b> collating relevant data, & building the collation & evaluation process into program implementation	3	3
<b>Exploring innovative funding options</b> to supplement diminishing public dollars e.g. attracting private dollars to the sector	3	6
<b>Targeting:</b> services to those most at risk	3	3
<b>COMMUNITY OUTCOMES</b>		
<b>Promoting social inclusion</b>	3	3
<b>Educating the community:</b> to reduce discrimination	3	6
<b>Capacity building:</b> helping communities develop the social & economic resources to prevent people pursuing detrimental pathways	3	3

## Policy divergence

Despite substantial concordance between different policy approaches, there are also areas of policy divergence, which will need to be resolved when developing policies to address homelessness and housing for ex-prisoners. These relate to:

### Client responsibility and client empowerment

Public acceptance of perceived benefits for prisoners is not readily forthcoming. Not surprisingly, some hold the opinion that prisoners have forfeited the right to actively participate in community life and reap the associated benefits. In applying a restorative ethos and encouraging offender responsibility for past misdeeds and future rehabilitation, the general public can witness an offender's commitment to reintegration (Lehman et al. 2002). Conversely, people who have experienced homelessness should be encouraged to harness their assets to exit their homeless state (Neil & Fopp 1994), but cannot be held responsible for the (possibly) societal factors that contributed to their housing situation. In a related fashion, the contributions clients can make to homelessness policy development, program implementation, and their own receipt of services are well recognised in client empowerment models of homelessness service delivery (e.g. McDonald 1994). Whilst prisoners are encouraged to contribute to their own reintegration and case planning, their input is typically not sought with respect to broader policy development or service implementation both for the reasons outlined above, and because of the practical security concerns of correctional authorities. Similarly, the development of post-release policy typically does not involve the same extensive level of consultation with all potential stakeholders as in the development of housing strategies. The roles and rights of the prisoner as client will need to be clearly defined.

### Client assessment

Standardised instruments exist to assess prisoners' risk of re-offending. Correctional services in many jurisdictions around the world employ these system-wide. When coupled with case management and effective information management, assessment can permit all relevant partners in service provision to access and track clients' progress (confidentiality provisions notwithstanding), thus ensuring a continuum of care and a shared understanding of client needs. Every Australian jurisdiction has acknowledged the important role assessment plays in correctional practice, although jurisdictions vary in the degree with which they have actively implemented the assessment of all offenders using standardised tools and procedures.

Similar standardised and validated instruments have not yet been developed for system-wide use in the provision of homelessness services, but given the links between homelessness and post-release adjustment, it is critical that instruments employed in either sphere consider homelessness, other non-accommodation needs, and other factors linked to offending.

### Separating functions

Those responsible for the delivery of homelessness services highlight the benefits associated with separating the administration and management of housing from



the provision of non-accommodation supports. Benefits include clients clearly understanding how they relate to various service providers, and removing the potential for clients' rights to be compromised (e.g. Neil & Fopp 1994). Consistent with consumer empowerment, it is critical that access to housing support is never contingent on accepting non-accommodation services (for example McDonald 1994). In contrast, the correctional official responsible for the administration (supervision) of ex-prisoners in the community is often the person best placed to also provide (often mandatory) supports for these individuals, as has been the case under more traditional models of parole. It is difficult to assess the effectiveness of traditional models of parole supervision as there is little research that examines the relationship between parole supervision and deterrence or rehabilitation (Travis et al.: 21). It is known that simply increasing or intensifying levels of supervision or adopting stricter responses to breaching of conditions does not reduce offending (ibid.).

More recent conceptualisations of the roles of community correctional officers call for a combination of administration and support functions, with both these functions contributing to positive reintegrative change in the client<sup>8</sup> (see Taxman 2002). When ex-prisoners are not under community supervision (such as when they have been unconditionally released), those delivering supports have no way in which to compel clients to accept reintegrative interventions. In stark contrast to current thinking regarding homelessness, some suggest that incentives should be given to ex-prisoners when they successfully address reintegrative challenges such as AOD misuse (see Taxman 2002). Incentives would clearly need to be appropriate for individuals, but presumably they could include benefits such as priority access to housing. It is imperative therefore that there is a clear understanding between all parties as to what role access to accommodation might play in any incentives scheme and how this fits with beliefs about separation of function.

## Australian policy trends – national

The Australian Government has recognised that homelessness can have profoundly negative effects upon individuals, families and communities. The causes and effects of homelessness are complex, therefore the Government has also recognised that an holistic and coordinated response across the whole of government is necessary to tackle this problem, especially if homelessness prevention is the long-term aim. In May 2000, the then Minister for Family and Community Services, Senator Jocelyn Newman, called for community input into the development of a National Homelessness Strategy (NHS). The still-evolving NHS, built on stakeholder input, aims:

- ▶ 'to provide a strategic framework that will improve collaboration and linkages between existing programs and services, to improve outcomes for clients and reduce the incidence of homelessness;
- ▶ to identify best practice models, which can be promoted and replicated, that will enhance existing homelessness policies and programs;

<sup>8</sup> There has, however, been debate as to whether this can lead to role confusion for both the client and the correctional worker.

- ▶ to build the capacity of the community sector to improve linkages and networks; and
- ▶ to raise awareness of the issue of homelessness throughout all areas and levels of government and in the community' (*Department of Family and Community Services 2000: 6*)

through strategies of prevention, early intervention, crisis and support, and working together in social coalition. There is a strong emphasis on the participation of Australian and State/Territory Government agencies and appropriate community groups in policy evolution, implementation and delivery. The important place of the recipients of relevant services is also emphasised, as are the diverse needs of those particularly vulnerable to homelessness.

The Australian Government is not directly responsible for the administration of custodial justice (this responsibility belongs to the states and territories) yet the NHS acknowledges the housing vulnerabilities of, and recommends appropriate responses to, those in contact with the justice system and in housing crisis. Specifically, the NHS goals for those in contact with the justice system are:

- ▶ 'To prevent people who are homeless getting caught up in the criminal justice and correctional service systems for minor misdemeanours.
- ▶ To reduce the over-representation of people who are homeless in the criminal justice system and the prison population.
- ▶ To create pre- and post-release programs that prevent ex-prisoners becoming homelessness or re-offending.
- ▶ To reduce the risk of homelessness among the families of prisoners by giving them appropriate support.
- ▶ To prevent young people setting out on pathways that will lead them to prison and homelessness.
- ▶ To ensure that young people exiting detention or in contact with the juvenile justice system are given the best possible opportunity to establish a life outside crime' (*CACH 2003: 69*).

In order to achieve this, relevant authorities will need to make a priority actions that:

- ▶ 'Provide diversionary programs such as employment, training and recreation for people experiencing and at risk of homelessness who have or are at risk of having substance abuse problems.
- ▶ Tailor employment and training programs to meet the needs of prisoners and those exiting prisons (possibly using the JPET model).
- ▶ Ensure that people leaving prisons have a comprehensive support plan for the post-release period.
- ▶ Help prisoners secure housing immediately on release by providing at least one month's rent in advance.

- ▶ Provide prisoners with the accommodation required to secure their release and satisfy their parole conditions.
- ▶ Coordinate the efforts of Commonwealth, state and territory agencies to ensure that all people leaving prison have stable accommodation and income in the post-release period and access to necessary support services, including drug and alcohol services and employment services' (CACH 2003: 69-70).

In addition to the partners and initiatives captured within the NHS, a key initiative is the Supported Accommodation Assistance Program (SAAP). This Commonwealth-state/territory government scheme aims to achieve national outcomes such as the reduction of homelessness, the promotion of self-reliance and independence amongst those who have experienced homelessness, and partnerships with other service systems to meet client needs. Strategies include case management, seeking and using client feedback, and the development of flexible and responsive services. The Australian Government occupies a leadership role in the initiative, whereas the states and territories are tasked with developing strategies consistent with the national framework and working to realise these, whilst also providing data to assess performance (see Department of Family & Community Services 1999a; Department of Family & Community Services 1999b).

As noted earlier, 1,282 SAAP agencies operated across Australia in 2002/03 and total recurrent SAAP funding for that financial year was \$310.4 million (AIHW 2003: xvii). Agencies provided 176,300 support periods to 97,600 clients during that financial year. SAAP is not a small-scale program.

SAAP agencies do not merely provide supported accommodation. An examination of services requested by SAAP clients in 2002/03 shows high levels of demand for assistance in areas such as:

- ▶ financial and employment matters;
- ▶ counselling in relation to sexual assault, domestic violence, relationships and problem gambling;
- ▶ general support and advocacy in relation to living skills, legal issues, client advocacy and liaison, retrieval and storage of belongings and general advice and information;
- ▶ specialist services such as psychological, psychiatric, physical and intellectual disability, alcohol and other drug treatment, health and medical services; and
- ▶ basic living support and services such as meals, laundry and shower facilities, recreation and transport (AIHW 2003: 41).

The list of services provided under SAAP is in itself an indication of the complex nature of homeless and the diversity of factors that contribute to its reduction or escalation.

There is some criticism in the literature of the Commonwealth's strategic response. It has been argued that the Commonwealth has not taken the national leadership role that it should and that the NHS needs to more fully complement state and territory strategies (Wright-Howie 2003: 32). Wright-Howie argues that much of the NHS

relies on research projects, reference to existing programs and pilot projects that will not necessarily make a lasting difference to levels of homelessness.

The role of short-term pilot programs in the NHS has also been criticised by Cresswell (2003: 7–8). While noting that the NHS has engendered awareness and led to strategic development, projects and evaluation at different levels of government and the community, Cresswell contends (pp 7-8) that the NHS must be more than just a collection of pilot programs. To achieve lasting outcomes, there needs to be a greater commitment of resources to those areas identified as causes of homelessness, such as through actions to reduce housing waiting lists, reduce poverty and unemployment, address family violence and child abuse, increase SAAP funding to meet unmet demand and increase access and specialist service options. To achieve this says Cresswell, the NHS would need to incorporate a long-term action plan supported by committed Commonwealth resources and close, supported partnerships between the Commonwealth and the states and territories. The action plan would need to deliver well-resourced, targeted and evaluated initiatives that addressed the causes of homelessness, clearly linked to strategies in areas such as employment health and well-being.

The argument that the Commonwealth needs to provide greater leadership and funding is also brought out by the Community Housing Federation of Australia (2001), which sees community housing as having great potential to contribute to the development of affordable housing. The Federation argues that there needs to be a national housing system, rather than housing assistance, underpinned by a national housing strategy that addresses economic and policy barriers that are currently limiting expansion of the community housing sector (2001: 4 and 10). Adequately funded community housing, the Federation contends, can link with complex needs and provide appropriate supports, as has been demonstrated through the development of holistically responsive community housing programs in the United Kingdom (2001: 14–15).

Wood (2003: 6) sees the NHS somewhat differently, noting that the Strategy aims to build the knowledge base on homelessness through funding pilot programs that aim to develop innovative solutions to both prevent and respond to homelessness. The Strategy then feeds the knowledge into policy formulation and administration. The advantages of this kind of approach, Wood contends, are that it is dynamic and flexible. On the other hand, he says that the approach obscures visibility of its impact, particularly in terms of prevention. It is hard to demonstrate that responses that operate at one level, such as by targeting families, have a future impact at another level, such as reducing youth homelessness. Nonetheless, Wood is very supportive of the way the Strategy has raised the profile of homelessness and the level of response at the national, state and local government levels that it has generated.

## **Australian policy trends — states and territories**

Each Australian jurisdiction has either articulated, or is in the process of developing, its strategic approach to homelessness in response to the NHS and SAAP. Despite the varying stages of evolution, there is consistency in the means being adopted

to address homelessness. Table 3 on page 68 summarises the policy directions articulated by the jurisdictions with respect to addressing housing stress and homelessness. Policy directions are drawn from publicly available documents produced by differing government agencies, but given that all states and territories espouse a whole of government response to homelessness, it is reasonable to assume that policy actions are intended to be viewed in the context of the entire jurisdiction.

As can be noted from Table 3, all jurisdictions are embracing the notion of collaborative working partnerships between government agencies, or 'whole of government' responses, and there is a strong emphasis on partnerships with community agencies as well. Across the jurisdictions there is a major emphasis on developing responses that are flexible and meet clients' individual needs as well as recognising the need for a fully developed knowledge and data base.

It is essential that all jurisdictional strategies adequately consider the needs of subpopulations of people experiencing homelessness, such as ex-prisoners. As seen in Table 3, the majority of jurisdictions explicitly acknowledge that ex-prisoners are vulnerable to housing stress and homelessness, but this brief examination of published jurisdictional policy material suggests that Victoria and Western Australia are the only two states in which correctional and public housing authorities are working in direct collaboration to provide dedicated, specialist housing for offenders leaving custody.

### Australian Capital Territory

The Australian Capital Territory (ACT) is in a unique position within Australia as it does not, at the time of writing, operate a correctional facility for sentenced prisoners. The ACT does operate remand, periodic detention and juvenile justice facilities. Offenders convicted and sentenced to imprisonment by ACT courts serve their sentences in New South Wales under cost recovery arrangements with that state. Despite not operating a sentenced facility, the ACT potentially faces issues with housing individuals released from remand custody, those who return to the ACT after serving sentences in NSW and a small number who may relocate or return to the ACT after being in custody in other states.

The ACT Government established an Affordable Housing Taskforce and a Homelessness Advisory Group in 2002 to oversee the development of a homelessness strategy (see Department of Disability, Housing and Community Services - DHCS - 2003; Wood 2003). Representatives from government departments and the community sector engaged in needs analysis, community consultation and established working groups to look at a range of specific issues, including those relating to corrective services and youth justice (ACT Homelessness Advisory Group 2003). The Government allocated \$13.3 million in the 2003/04 Budget to respond to housing and homelessness issues.

The recently released ACT Homelessness Strategy (DHCS 2003: 4) identifies a number of groups needing specific focus, including people leaving custody or who are involved in the criminal justice system. The Strategy notes that people leaving custodial care often do not have a home or job to return to and are less likely than the rest of the community to have a financial reserve. People leaving custody are noted

to be reliant on income support and face discrimination in the labour market, while unstable post-release accommodation is recognised as a major predictor, together with drug and alcohol misuse, of an offender's return to prison.

The Strategy is based on principles that include collaborative partnerships between the various government agencies and the community sector, on the basis of a compact established between the community sector and the ACT Government (DHCS 2003: 9). The Strategy recognises the benefits that can arise from a greater community awareness and understanding of homelessness and that this will begin to reduce barriers and discriminatory practices experienced by homeless people (DHCS 2003: 10).

The ACT Homelessness Strategy establishes a wide range of actions which seek to build on collaborative mechanisms and improved understanding to improve access to housing and outcomes for the homeless on many levels. It establishes 82 separate actions under 13 objectives. Many of these are broad in scope across the homeless population and impact on outcomes for ex-prisoners as members of the general population. More specific actions include identifying options to better support women and children escaping family violence, developing medium term accommodation and support for people leaving custody or involved with the criminal justice system, including developing intensive support options for those who need it.

ACT Corrective Services has begun to address accommodation issues that might arise if a prison were to be established in the ACT. The report of the ACT Prison Community Panel (2000), facilitated by ACT Corrective Services, noted that a community support network is essential if rehabilitation is to be successful, and noted post-release support, half-way houses and accommodation assistance as fundamental components of that support network. The panel also noted that special attention needed to be paid to the transition from the prison to the community, again noting the need for accommodation and other support (2000: 8 & 64).

## New South Wales

In 1999 the New South Wales Government implemented the Partnership Against Homelessness (PAH) initiative, which brings together 10 government agencies in a collaborative effort to address homelessness. The initiative recognises ex-offenders within one of the eight priority areas identified under PAH (New South Wales Department of Housing (NSW DOH) 2003a). The PAH network includes the Department of Corrective Services as well as agencies such as the Department of Housing, the Department of Health and the Premier's Department (NSW DOH 2003b).

The PAH aims to improve services for the homeless by (NSW DOH 2003b):

- providing better access to services;
- coordinating support services;
- improving access to crisis accommodation; and
- facilitating exit into long term housing.

Amongst the initiatives being pursued by PAH, of the most relevance to ex-prisoners, are (NSW DOH 2003a: 2):

- ▶ coordinating additional support services with the aim of giving homeless or recently housed people a greater chance of staying in their own homes;
- ▶ addressing the needs of Indigenous homeless people;
- ▶ enabling people to make a smooth transition from crisis accommodation to transitional accommodation to long-term housing; and
- ▶ increasing Department of Housing flexibility for people needing temporary accommodation outside normal business hours.

The NSW Department of Corrective Services (NSW DCS) identifies the focus of their throughcare model as using an offenders' time in custody to prepare them for a successful return to the community and recognises housing as a fundamental aspect of this return (NSW Department of Corrective Services - NSW DCS - 2002: 6). As well as its involvement with PAH, the Department provides funding to a number of community-based non-profit organisations who support ex-prisoners, including Glebe House and Guthries Housing which provide supported crisis accommodation for recently released males and females respectively (NSW DCS: 34).

NSW DCS also convened the Inner City Homelessness Service Planning Forum, as part of the PAH initiative, in 2001 (Inner City Homeless Planning Forum 2001). Among the needs in homelessness service provision identified in this forum were:

- ▶ consistent assessment procedures and information across PAH agencies;
- ▶ an information clearinghouse and cohesive data set, as well as data relating to sub-groups, such as Indigenous homeless;
- ▶ early intervention and prevention for at-risk young people, especially through schools;
- ▶ more crisis housing, especially for specialist sub-groups, such as intellectually disabled people in repeated contact with the criminal justice system;
- ▶ better health services for the homeless, catering for health issues of particular prevalence in the homeless; and
- ▶ better coordination of services to respond more seamlessly to client's needs.

The establishment of the PAH is a significant step in establishing a collaborative 'whole of government' approach to homelessness and, from the point of view of homelessness among ex-prisoners, it is particularly encouraging to see the NSW DCS as a key partner in the initiative. The work of the PAH also needs to be seen in context with the support provided by a range of non-government organisations providing support, either specifically to ex-prisoners or to the homeless generally (Meehan 2002: 11–12) as well as the assistance provided by the Commonwealth through SAAP and various government agencies.

Despite the PAH initiative, Meehan contends that there remain some critical gaps in the NSW approach to homelessness. He argues that while there are efforts to put in place specific service provisions, these are not supported by a comprehensive

policy framework and there is not a wide variety of options and targeted programs for specific subpopulations. Meehan also argues that, while the PAH brings together all the relevant government agencies, there is a lack of coordination between government and non-government organisations. In relation to the problems faced by ex-prisoners, Meehan also points to a lack of pre-release information on housing options and a lack of programs designed to keep homeless people out of prison. Meehan calls for a greater recognition of the high-level needs of prisoners, the introduction of housing options information into prisons and the development of more prisoner-specific supports.

It remains to be seen at this stage whether the PAH embraces Meehan's contentions, though its establishment certainly provides greater scope to address these problems than was previously the case.

### Northern Territory

The Northern Territory experiences unique homelessness and accommodation issues due to its geographic location, the sparseness of its population centres, its relatively large Aboriginal population and the existence of remote Aboriginal communities (Rechner 2003: 22). A large itinerant Aboriginal population has led to policy responses which recognise the ways in which concepts of home and homelessness are culturally different than those of the non-Aboriginal population. The Territory also has a very high imprisonment rate, which includes a significant over-representation of Aboriginal inmates.

The Northern Territory's overarching policy on homelessness and housing is 'Home Territory' operated by Territory Housing. It aims to improve accessibility and suitability of accommodation for those with special needs, including those with disabilities or serious medical conditions, youth, the Aboriginal population, seniors, victims of family violence and those who are itinerant or homeless (Territory Housing 2002). The policy does not specifically address accommodation issues for ex-prisoners.

Northern Territory Correctional Services recognises accommodation as one of the issues on which Community Corrections clients may require specialist support (Northern Territory Correctional Services 2001: 47). Community Corrections works on establishing relationships with community service providers and notes that it facilitates referrals in the community as well as in the prison environment (ibid.). It is interesting to note though that the Department's Annual Report does not make specific mention of accommodation issues for those not serving a Community Corrections order, nor does the Department mention these issues in its Strategic Plan (NT Department of Justice 2002).

### Queensland

The Queensland Department of Housing's (QLD DOH) policy strategy is based on a highly outcomes focused direction which seeks to create sustainable communities, provide successful housing outcomes through client delivery which is integrated, flexible and easy to access (QLD DOH 2000). The strategy recognises the need for partnerships, including with the Department of Corrective Services (QLD DCS) and recognises people leaving correctional institutions as a particularly vulnerable



sub-population with complex needs. The strategy also reflects approaches to the management of public housing stock in an environment that creates significant challenges for the financial management and availability of housing.

Queensland has also developed an action plan to target homelessness which, for 2003/04, focuses on Indigenous housing and public space issues. The plan includes development of a memorandum of understanding between Queensland state and Commonwealth departments to assist offenders clear housing debts prior to release. This is welcome, given that these debts have been identified earlier in this paper as a significant barrier to some individuals establishing long-term housing.

QLD DCS recognises the need to assist prisoners in their preparation for reintegration into the community and the Department's Annual Report notes that Queensland correctional centres have well-established practices to achieve this (QLD DCS 2002: 33). The Department participated in the Senior Officers Group on Homelessness which was formed to coordinate actions arising from the Queensland Government's Homelessness Strategy (QLD DCS: 34). The Department acknowledges that rehabilitation cannot be achieved in isolation from other government and non-government agencies (QLD DCS 2003: 6).

Against this background, Hill (2003) has argued that Queensland lacks a workable framework for addressing homelessness because the Commonwealth and State authorities do not address the key structural issues, such as health, education and income. Hill contends that local governments and non-government agencies have to try and address the effects of these structural problems, despite them being beyond the scope of these bodies to deal with. Hill has further argued that Queensland policy has been developed without proper consultation, including with homeless people and that structural changes have resulted in there being far more pathways into homelessness than out of it.

### South Australia

Reducing homelessness is priority for the South Australian Government's Social Inclusion Initiative, established to deal with a range of major social issues (Social Inclusion Board 2003: v). The Social Inclusion Board directs the Initiative. The four key elements of the Initiative's framework on homelessness are:

- ▶ an integrated, multi-dimensional and multi-agency approach;
- ▶ a focus on Aboriginal homelessness;
- ▶ interventions across the continuum of homelessness; and
- ▶ interventions that will have maximum impact in reducing homelessness.

The Social Inclusion Board has recommended, amongst a total of 37 recommendations, that:

... the Department for Correctional Services lead the development of a cross-government strategy, in collaboration with the Department of Human Services and the non-government sector, to address the accommodation and support needs of people at immediate risk of homelessness exiting correctional facilities (Social Inclusion Board: xiii)

and that

... the Department for Correctional Services lead the development of a cross-government strategy, in collaboration with the Department of Human Services and the non-government sector, to address the accommodation and support needs of homeless people, and people at immediate risk of homelessness, exiting remand (ibid.: xvi).

This latter recommendation recognises that those people frequently held by the police in the City Watch House are an extremely vulnerable group, marked by transience, complex needs, challenging behaviours, lack of support and often held for breaches of the peace while heavily intoxicated (ibid.: xvii).

Implementation of programs to improve transition from correctional facilities and remand to the community, and improve housing outcomes for ex-prisoners and offenders, has been established as one of the first actions to come from the Initiative (Social Inclusion Unit 2003: 14-15). The Social Inclusion Board, in formulating its recommendations noted the range of barriers ex-prisoners face trying to secure appropriate accommodation (ibid.: 45), including:

- ▶ income insecurity;
- ▶ prejudice by private landlords and real estate agents;
- ▶ debts, including to the South Australian Housing Trust, not addressed while in prison;
- ▶ loss of possessions while in custody;
- ▶ high rent and establishment (bond etc.) costs;
- ▶ lack of, or poor, tenancy history and lack of references;
- ▶ lack of skills to acquire and manage housing;
- ▶ lack of support services for those with substance abuse problems, mental health issues and family violence issues; and
- ▶ lack of essential items such as whitegoods, bedding and furniture.

The Social Inclusion Board has noted (2003: 46) that prisoners serving less than six months, who constituted 87 per cent of discharges in 2002, especially those without a non-parole period, are not particularly well served by the assessment and sentence planning process and do not receive case management services. The Board's recommendations were made against a background which includes a Department for Correctional Services estimate that about 10 per cent of clients in community-based corrections were without safe, secure and stable housing (ibid.: 47-48). This number rose to 23 per cent for female prisoners. The Board also recognises the particular challenges and vulnerabilities faced by Aboriginal prisoners and female prisoners, including problems around reconciliation with children.

## Tasmania

The overarching homelessness policy in Tasmania is the 'Affordable Housing Strategy' which is aimed at low income earners and others with special needs

(Housing Tasmania 2003). Affordable housing is a strategic priority area, recognising that housing provides a vital foundation to link people with employment, education, health and other services and a basis for facilitating participation in the wider community. The Strategy recognises the need for a collaborative approach across the government and community (Housing Tasmania). The Strategy also involves a major reform of SAAP (Murray 2003), including:

- ▶ after hours services;
- ▶ common assessment tool and accredited training in its use;
- ▶ establishing transitional support;
- ▶ brokerage model which includes purchasing emergency accommodation from the private sector;
- ▶ provision of additional funds for flexible case planning; and
- ▶ partnerships between SAAP and mental health services.

Consultation leading to development of the Strategy involved a range of government and non-government agencies and interest and advocacy groups (Robyn Kennedy & Coy 2003). It is notable though that there was no stakeholder consultation with agencies or bodies representing the interests of ex-prisoners, nor does the Strategy specifically mention ex-prisoners as a high-risk or high-needs group. This may or may not be related to the fact that the Strategy focuses on and discusses 'affordable housing' without specifically examining homelessness.

Justice Tasmania, the Department responsible for corrections in that State, does not make reference to homelessness, ex-prisoner accommodation issues or preparation for return to the community in its Annual Report (Department of Justice and Industrial Relations 2003) or on its website (<http://www.justice.tas.gov.au>).

## Victoria

Policy concerning the post-release housing needs of ex-prisoners is most fully articulated and advanced in terms of implementation in Victoria. The interagency Transitional Housing Management – Corrections Housing Pathways Initiative (THM-CHPI) commenced in December 2001 and its final evaluation report is due in June 2004. The THM-CHPI is the product of two Victorian Government initiatives, namely the Victorian Homelessness Strategy and the Corrections Long Term Management Strategy (Aktepe & Lake 2003: 3). These Strategies recognised ex-prisoners as a highly vulnerable group and that efforts needed to be undertaken to reduce re-offending and rising prison numbers.

The Victorian Homelessness Strategy Ministerial Advisory Committee (2001) recognised that prisoners faced certain critical problems in relation to homelessness:

- ▶ many prisoners who do not have support from family members or others in the community will leave prison without any post-release support, including housing assistance and material aid;

- ▶ there is a lack of data on prisoners' housing status or risk of homelessness on release;
- ▶ case management within prisons does not assess or plan for post-release housing;
- ▶ SAAP funds a small number of post-release services but the SAAP Act precludes expansion in this area;
- ▶ communication and information dissemination about housing options are restricted by prison structures and rules;
- ▶ the homeless service system may be structured to respond once a person becomes homeless but not to assist the transition from prison to community and address housing risk before homelessness arises; and
- ▶ prisoners on remand and serving short sentences have been neglected by policy developments.

The Victorian Homelessness Strategy Focus Group on Homelessness and Pre- and Post-Release Services for Prisoners (Victorian Department of Human Services 2001a) recognised that to be effective, post-release services had to have the following key principles:

- ▶ begin pre-release and extend post-release, including community support;
- ▶ allow prisoners to maintain constant and meaningful relationships;
- ▶ follow throughcare principles, with relationships with service providers established pre-release;
- ▶ maximise community involvement;
- ▶ aim for the right placement the first time to minimise overall failure;
- ▶ provide practical support for the transition to the community, such as financial management assistance;
- ▶ take account of multiple and complex needs; and
- ▶ target high risk individuals who are most likely to fail on release.

The focus group also noted that appropriate exit plans needed to provide an assessment that took into account major risk factors for homelessness, such as homelessness or poor housing history before imprisonment, having lost housing during imprisonment, having serious alcohol or other drug issues and having a lack of community support (Department of Human Services 2001b). The group also considered that it was most cost-effective for those serving short sentences to retain their housing during the sentence and that a prisoner's place on the public housing waiting list should be frozen during their term of imprisonment.

Arising from this, the THM-CHPI aims to:

- ▶ reduce the incidence of homelessness for people leaving prison;
- ▶ improve the transitional experience of exiting prisoners;
- ▶ reduce offending through positive housing outcomes;
- ▶ provide information on the effectiveness of housing outreach in preventing homelessness; and

- ▶ collect data on the housing needs of people exiting prison.

The Initiative has been introduced in three Victorian prisons, one a women's prison, one a large metropolitan prison and the other a regional prison (Aktepe & Lake: 4). The Initiative aims to address one of the critical problems for prisoners by ensuring existing accommodation is not lost during incarceration (if relevant) or by facilitating placement in appropriate accommodation upon release, that is, either specialist housing stock, or through timely negotiation with relevant agencies (Aktepe 2003; Aktepe & Lake 2003).

The Office of Housing allocated 61 transitional housing properties to the Initiative, within the Transitional Housing Management (THM) Program. Housing Placement Workers have been established in each of the pilot prisons and provide information, assessments, referrals and placements. If an individual prisoner meets the criteria for the THM-CHPI, demonstrates capacity to live independently and agrees to the terms of the Initiative they are matched to an accommodation and support package. If a property is available, the prisoner is referred to an Initiative Support Provider who assists with the prisoner's resettlement into the community through support and assistance with addressing the issues that contributed to the prisoner's accommodation problems.

While the success of the Initiative cannot be judged until the in-built evaluation process is completed, early indications have been very positive, with a number of clients moving into long-term housing, a high rate of successful bail applications and reduced periods of incarceration for those who have re-offended (Aktepe and Lake: 7). Implementation of the Initiative has also highlighted the complexities of competing work cultural interests between the various stakeholders. A specific problem has been tension arising from balancing the need to access clients in prison well before their release date, and the difficulty of keeping one of the limited stock of accommodation beds available during this period (Aktepe & Lake: 6). The Initiative has also highlighted the numbers of people leaving prison with complex mental health issues and/or a significant intellectual disability who are not prepared to live independently at the point of their release (ibid.: 7).

In addition to its involvement in THM-CHPI, the Victorian Department of Justice operates 'Bridging the Gap', a \$3.5 million pilot program offering intensive transitional support to high risk/high needs offenders through access to drug and alcohol treatment, health and legal assistance, training and employment and support with accommodation and family issues (Victorian Department of Justice 2002). The Department has also invested in the development of pre-release programs and information booklets (see Victorian Association for the Care and Rehabilitation of Offenders (VACRO) 2003).

## Western Australia

Western Australia established a State Homelessness Taskforce in 2001 to develop ways government agencies could work together to address homelessness (Ellery 2003: 23). The Western Australian Government's response to the Taskforce's report acknowledged interruptions to stability through imprisonment, long-term care or institutional living as a major cause of vulnerability to homelessness (Government of Western Australia 2002). In this response, the Government allocated \$1.36 million over four years to support those exiting the justice system.

Table 3: Housing policy directions articulated by Australian states and territories

<b>POLICY APPROACH (a)</b>	<b>NSW</b>	<b>VIC</b>	<b>QLD</b>	<b>SA</b>	<b>WA</b>	<b>TAS</b>	<b>NT</b>	<b>ACT</b>
Housing or correctional policy explicitly recognises ex-prisoners as vulnerable to homelessness (b)	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3
<b>SERVICE DELIVERY ETHOS</b>								
Partnerships								
• interagency/intersectoral	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3
• government & non-government	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3
Stakeholder input	6	3	6	3	3	3	3	3
Dedicated funding for ex-prisoner initiatives	3	3	6	3	6	6	6	6
Addressing the client/consumer holistically	3	3	6	3	3	3	3	3
Flexibility of client options	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3
Client empowerment	6	3	6	3	6	6	6	6
Clients' rights	3	3	3	6	3	6	6	6
Developing client independence	6	3	6	6	3	6	6	6
Developing client responsibility	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6
Developing staff skills	6	3	3	3	6	3	3	6
Prevention	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3
Early intervention	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3
<b>IMPLEMENTATION</b>								
Client assessment								
• formal & standardised	6	3	6	6	6	3	6	6
• informal	3	3	3	6	6	6	6	6
Client input to individual services	6	3	3	6	6	6	6	6
Case planning & management	3	3	3	3	3	3	6	3
Separating support from bureaucratic requirements	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6
Continuum of care/throughcare for prisoners	6	3	6	3	3	6	6	6
Tangible targets	6	3	3	3	3	6	6	3
Information management	3	3	3	6	3	6	6	6
Formal program evaluation	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3
Exploring innovative funding options	3	6	3	3	3	3	3	6
Targeting clients at risk	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3
<b>COMMUNITY OUTCOMES</b>								
Promoting social inclusion	6	6	3	3	3	3	6	6
Educating the community	6	3	3	3	3	3	6	6
Community capacity building	6	6	3	3	3	6	3	6

(a) Appendix B contains a listing of the public domain documents consulted in order to gain insight into policies articulated by the relevant authorities in states and territories. Importantly, this information is not based on an exhaustive search of all possible information sources: rather it is intended to provide a broad indication of recent and developing policy, and anticipated or actual practice.

(b) Unless otherwise stated, the policy relates to people experiencing homelessness in general, not ex-prisoners in particular.

The Western Australian Attorney-General, Jim McGinty (McGinty 2002), reporting on a visit to various European countries, noted that re-offending is not simply a justice department problem, but is a problem requiring management across the whole of government. He acknowledged a lack of suitable housing as one of the causes of re-offending and discussed the need to establish partnerships between the Departments of Justice, Health, Housing and Education and Training, in addition to other government and non-government agencies to work towards a common goal of reducing re-offending.

Subsequently, Western Australia has implemented a coordinated and collaborative approach to prisoner reintegration through establishment of the Community Re-Entry Program for Prisoners (WA Department of Justice 2003). The Department of Justice has allocated \$2.4 million to establish a 'Re-entry Coordination Service' in each prison throughout the state. Non-government organisations have been contracted to deliver services to provide support for prisoners through links to accommodation, training, employment and drug treatment. The initiative also includes funding for intensive mentoring and support services for very high needs prisoners as well as the allocation of additional public housing for people leaving prison.

### **Some suggestions for best practice in dealing with ex-prisoner homelessness**

Drawing on policy directions and developments around the world, it is possible to make a few suggestions regarding principal features of best practice in the areas of post-release homelessness.

#### **Collaborative approaches**

Within the area of welfare provision, there has emerged in recent years a strong emphasis on collaborative working between various government departments and non-government practitioners and agencies. This trend, seen in both Australia and the United Kingdom, aims to achieve a more effective delivery of welfare services and responses, and recognises the need to address the full range of welfare issues within the community. In the UK this collaborative approach has generally been referred to as 'joined up thinking', while in Australia the notion of 'whole of government' working has been dominant (Anderson 2001: 16–17).

In both Australia and the UK the trend towards collaborative working has seen the development of more comprehensive strategies to address homelessness. In Australia this has included the development of homelessness strategies at both the national and State level. In the UK, several major reviews have been undertaken and efforts continue to be made to develop and refine strategic directions using joined up approaches (Anderson: 17).

While the emphasis on collaborative and holistic approaches appears to be a positive direction, there is a lack of empirical evidence to show whether or not it is actually effective in improving the situation of homeless people (Anderson: 18). It is important however, to recognise that collaborative working can provide a means of more effectively coordinating resources and more effectively operating the mechanics

of policy development (ibid.). A collaborative approach does not in itself determine what resources will be applied to addressing homelessness, nor does it determine what the policy directions will be. It can provide a means of getting towards the root causes of the social disadvantages that contribute to homelessness. Actually addressing these root causes though, requires each agency or body involved to not only work collaboratively but to work effectively within their area of responsibility. For agencies to work effectively, they must have policies that are well-designed and directed, and adequate and appropriate resources to successfully implement them.

Applying collaborative thinking to the issue of homelessness among ex-prisoners, it is notable that many service providers, particularly government agencies, have not recognised ex-prisoners as a 'special needs' client group. Government agencies, such as those responsible for housing and health, may provide services to ex-prisoners alongside other clients without recognising the particular needs that ex-prisoners bring. It has therefore generally fallen to the corrections agency to endeavour to provide offender-specific services (Ogilvie 2001b: 16). One of the difficulties with this approach is that the corrections agency, in particular its community corrections arm, has had to rely on interactions with other agencies and balance the sometimes competing interests of incapacitation, punishment, rehabilitation, deterrence and denunciation (ibid.).

Providing effective services to ex-prisoners needs to recognise the central roles played by a variety of Government agencies, particularly those with responsibilities for housing, health, education, employment and training (ibid.). This needs to coincide with a recognition of the specific needs of ex-prisoners and a recognition of the whole-of-community benefits to be gained from minimising re-offending and behaviours such as drug and alcohol abuse. Assisting ex-prisoners to successfully return to the community requires these agencies to work together with the corrections agency to establish integrated and sensitive responses to the accommodation and other needs of ex-prisoners. As Ogilvie (2001b: 17) notes, the challenge in doing this is to overcome the notion that ex-prisoners do not deserve the extra attention and services they may need to avoid multiplying or perpetuating the punishment that incarceration provides.

In working towards a recognition of the specific needs of ex-prisoners, it is important that agencies allow the views of ex-prisoners, as well as non ex-prisoners who have experienced homelessness, to inform their policy development. Consultative processes should involve representatives of bodies representing or providing services to ex-prisoners and the homeless. Government departments should draw on the existing research to inform their policy development processes and may even become involved in conducting or commissioning original research. As Anderson (2001: 18) has noted, policy development on homelessness tends to be largely 'top down' with the agenda being set by central government and then filtering down to operational agencies. This is not to say this approach is negative, as it allows governments to play a strong leadership and coordination role and links policy closely with resources. At the same time however, it does not necessarily allow for the empowerment of homeless people in the policy development process and 'there remains considerable scope for the voices of homeless Australians to be heard as



part of the ‘whole of Government’ approach to addressing their needs’ (Anderson 2001: 18).

### Establishing prisoner-sensitive interactions

A number of writers have commented on the need to be particularly aware of the needs of serving prisoners and ex-prisoners in providing them with support and assistance (for example see Davis 2001: 15). This client group tends to have a distrust of Government agencies and other authority figures and may be very cynical about the ability or genuine willingness of others to help them in meaningful ways. As noted earlier, those who have served time in custody may be overly wary or confrontational, have problems engaging in socially acceptable ways and may have deficits in many basic living skills. Prisoners and ex-prisoners may have experienced traumas and disadvantages beyond most others in the community. They may be less able to cope with stress and may be easily discouraged by problems or set-backs.

Those in government or community agencies who interact with serving prisoners or ex-prisoners may need specific training or education if they are to understand the particular needs of this client group and deal with them in ways that avoid conflict and provide effective and appropriate support. Service providers must be able to establish a rapport based on this understanding and be accepted by the client as credible and sincere. While workers in the welfare or community sectors must always be careful to ensure they do not offer services or assistance they cannot ultimately deliver, this is particularly important when dealing with ex-prisoners who may feel they have been let down many times before.

### Pre- and post-release programs

There is a clear need for programs to be available to serving prisoners which will help them acquire the knowledge and skills necessary to successfully re-enter the community. However most prisoners do not participate in programs and the level of participation appears to be dropping (Travis, Solomon & Waul 2001). In New South Wales, the number of hours of education provided to prisoners has markedly reduced in the last decade (Baldry et al. 2003c: 6).

Research that has included interviews with prisoners and ex-prisoners suggests that the process of reception, induction and classification does not prepare prisoners for the realities of prison life, or assist them in preparing for their release (Rough Sleepers Unit 2001). The research also suggests most prisoners are not adequately prepared for release and many leave prison without any real idea about where they are going or what they are doing (for example see Rough Sleepers Unit 2001).

Given that, as noted earlier, almost all prisoners received into the correctional system will be released from it at some stage, a throughcare approach suggests that the process of identifying and putting mechanisms in place to address a prisoner’s post-release needs should begin as early as possible in the period of incarceration. Certainly the indeterminate nature of remand custody and sentences that include a parole period does not make this process any easier but it is important that attempts be made to ensure all prisoners — whether remanded or sentenced — are adequately prepared for their release. For many prisoners adequate preparation can

mean, quite simply, the difference between a successful return to the community or a return to offending and possibly imprisonment.

Collaborative approaches to service provision for prisoners need to be supported by a throughcare philosophy. Individualised interventions that address the full range of an offender's needs should commence as early as possible. This may require intervention through agencies such as those responsible for education, housing, health and social security when a person first comes into contact with the criminal justice system. The intervention of other non-justice agencies should be individually adapted and continued throughout and following correctional contact, to ensure the offender does not emerge from imprisonment with the same unmet needs that were linked to their original offending behaviour.

Corrective Services departments in Australia typically fund or contribute to funding only a small amount of post-release support. Baldry et al. (2003c: 3) note that in New South Wales, for example, only 0.3 per cent of the correctional budget is directed to community based post-release programs. A number of government agencies provide services to ex-prisoners in the areas of housing, health, family and community services and social security but, generally, these agencies do not have policies or programs specifically targeted to those recently released from prison (ibid.).

The importance of programs, whether provided by Corrective Services or community agencies, is shown by the finding that ex-prisoners who attend post-release programs are significantly more likely to remain out of prison than those who do not undertake such programs (Baldry et al. 2003c: 17).

### Elements of effective program models

Winther (2003: 17–8) has suggested factors that should be considered in developing a program model to address the needs of individuals recently released from custody, while integrating with pre-existing supported accommodation programs. Winther developed these factors specifically for young people aged 17 to 21 who have a history of institutional care and severe conduct and behavioural problems associated with dual diagnosis issues. These factors could also be applied, with little modification, to program models targeting adult single men, adult single women and families.

**Table 4: Suggested factors for post-release assistance model**

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**Factors to Consider in Developing an Appropriate Model**

- Needs to incorporate multiple stages and levels of support including intensive 24 hour, semi-intensive with 'live in resident mentors' and supported independent.
  - Needs to be designed to address the immediate needs for young people in the community or upon release from adult correctional institutions such as: primary health, complex legal issues, immediate homelessness, significant drug use and problematic behaviours.
  - The service responses need to be targeted towards: mental health issues, drug and alcohol treatment, vocational training and employment assistance, family reunification, independent living skills and long term housing plans.
  - The support provided should comprise subsidised rent and food, pre-release assessment and planning, intensive case management, programmatic outreach support, exit planning and ongoing transitional referral support.
  - There needs to be the flexibility for young people to move between models in an attempt to maintain support relationships and individualise service responses based on the level of risk and need.
  - The model should be based on a flexible model of current Transitional Housing Management (THM) guidelines, whereby rent payments can be negotiated between the post release support service and the young person for the first six weeks upon release.
  - Select properties should be allocated as crisis housing for short periods of time for such purposes as home detox, time out from current placement and to meet the immediate accommodation needs for young people exiting custody.
  - The model should have the capacity to accept referrals for pre-release transition.
  - The model should be able to function as the preparation stage prior to independent THM placement and allow for the appropriate assessment of needs and skills.
  - Needs to cover all metropolitan regions.
  - The model should have the capacity to cater for both Juvenile Justice and Corrections without 'contamination' issues.
  - The model should have the capacity to target specific demographic trends as well as specific ethnic and gender groups.
-

## Accessing serving prisoners

Taking into account the difficulties ex-prisoners face if they leave prison without appropriate accommodation or support arranged, service providers are now increasingly trying to provide 'in-reach' services to assist and support prisoners while they are still serving their sentences. Outcomes for releasing prisoners can be considerably enhanced if support services are able to provide information and assessment to prisoners approaching release. This allows the support service and the prisoner to establish a working relationship and to build trust while helping to ensure the prisoner's individual needs are understood and efforts made to meet them. In-reach work also allows the individual to leave prison knowing they have support and, where possible, accommodation arranged which allows them to immediately commence making positive steps towards reintegration.

One approach that has proven successful is the 'expo' organised by the Women's Accommodation Support Service (WASS), Offenders Aid and Rehabilitation Services of South Australia (OARS SA) in Adelaide Women's Prison (Dutreix 2003: 12). This involved 15 different agencies representing the areas of health, legal, financial, children, accommodation, domestic violence and drugs and alcohol. It gave the women prisoners an opportunity to gain information and talk to workers on an informal and non-confrontational basis that suited the individual women's needs. It also gave the prisoners contacts they could pursue as they approached release and after release. The reported success of this initiative could provide a good model for bringing external agencies into contact with serving prisoners and leading to better post-release outcomes for accommodation and other needs.

## Policy suggestions from research

Baldry et al's (2003a, 2003b, 2003c, 2003d) recent research into housing and recidivism outcomes for released prisoners provides a comprehensive insight into the difficulties faced by released prisoners and the factors that influence the likelihood of them returning to prison. The research has led the authors to propose a number of policy and practice initiatives to address the factors they identified. Their proposals are set out below.

Table 5: Policy suggestions from recent Australian research

- 
- Case-workers need to make connections with each and every prisoner before their release, with a view to providing post-release support.
  - All prisoners should be provided with relevant, up-to-date and accurate information before release.
  - Establishment of a multi-agency team approach to housing, health, mental health, AOD and employment. This needs to involve coordination and integration of programs and services and be informed by ex-prisoners' views and knowledge.
  - A continuum of supported housing from 24 hour intensive support in group settings through to independent living with less intensive support.
  - Where a released prisoner moves in with parents or other family members, avenues of support should be made available to the family members.
  - Released prisoners should have access to stable housing with assistance to maintain that housing.
  - Support workers should be well-trained in relevant fields.
  - Advocacy from case-workers should be available to help with issues such as housing debt, rental and rent assistance.
  - Development of specialised Indigenous women's post-release supported accommodation.
  - Holistic, strengths-based programs, rather than deficit-based programs, should be available post-release.
  - Greater levels of assistance to allow released prisoners to reside away from negative and heavily disadvantaged areas.
  - Continuation and expansion of work to build community strength and cohesion in cumulatively disadvantaged areas which many prisoners come from and return to.
  - Establishment of bail houses to reduce numbers of people held in remand on the basis of inadequate housing.
- 

### **Beyond government intervention**

Of course numerous non-government service providers around the nation ensure that ex-prisoners are not left without supports (for example CRC in NSW see Irvine 2002; OARS SA see Dutreix 2003). These can operate in close conjunction with relevant correctional and housing authorities, but many provide services independent of government funding or policy. Detailing these is beyond the scope of the current short review, but it is critical that governments assess the extent of non-government and other community service operations (for example Community Housing, see Community Housing Federation of Australia 2001) to ensure that scarce post-release dollars are utilised to their best efficiency. This will need to be part of a broader whole of government attempt to assess and improve welfare service delivery at both the state/territory and Australian Government level. This approach would be contingent on ensuring consistent and relevant data collection<sup>9</sup> across all agencies, regardless of whether they are involved in SAAP.

9 Such as obtaining realistic estimates of the numbers of ex-prisoner clients utilising specialist and nonspecialist accommodation and non-housing services, through the collation of detailed information concerning immediate and recent incarceration and accommodation history.

Practitioners working with Australians who find themselves homeless have remarked that leadership at a national level is critical to this process, because decisions that influence the macro-economic and social welfare environment are taken at this level, and coordinated responses across jurisdictions must be developed at a national level (Creswell 2003; Wright-Howie 2003).

While it is clear that having people in a situation of stable and secure housing — whether this be public housing, private housing with government assistance, or independent private housing — is preferable to having people in situations of homelessness, it would be wrong to conclude that simply providing housing will address the many social disadvantages that homeless people face. While it would be comforting to think that assisting a homeless person into housing will lift them from a state of social exclusion and remove problems such as poverty, restricted employment opportunities, poor health and exposure to crime, this is simply not the case.

As noted above, Mullins and Western (2001) have shown that public housing and government financial assistance are not enough to address severe levels of social disadvantage. These researchers did not compare the tenure groups to those without homes and their findings do not contradict the notion that those in public housing are better off than those with no housing. What the findings do suggest though is that providing homeless people with public housing, or assistance to remain in private housing, is not enough. As suggested above, addressing the problems faced by the homeless will necessarily involve a multi-agency approach that addresses — both independently and collaboratively — each of the areas of disadvantage. Giving a homeless person a place to live is an excellent start and provides a solid grounding for beginning to address the other problems. Failing to help the person find a job, move out of debt and poverty, become less socially isolated, deal with alcohol and other drug problems and address any offending behaviours will likely leave that person caught up again in a cycle that sees them lose their housing and stability and possibly end up back on the streets or in prison. It is self-evident that the homeless need homes, but they need far more than just a roof over their head.

## Appendix A: Clarifying terminology

### At risk

This term is employed in both the literature surrounding homelessness and that concerning post-release adjustment, with slightly different usage for each.

In the context of returning offenders, ‘at risk’ refers to those offenders who have been assessed as having a high risk of re-offending. Typically risk assessment is formal, standardised and the product of a purpose-designed instrument<sup>10</sup> that is used across the (usually correctional) agency. The formal risk assessment then guides the type of interventions implemented to address client offending (e.g. see Bonta 1997). Assessment instruments have generally been developed from extensive empirical data, allowing an actuarial estimate of risk to be made.

‘At risk’ of homelessness refers to those individuals not yet homeless, but whose current housing situation is tenuous or marginal. At present, there do not appear to be any standardised instruments that produce quantifiable, uniform estimates of risk employed in Australia. Rather, estimates are generally derived using professional observations, experience and knowledge of the sector, and relevant client information (Mackenzie & Chamberlain 2003).

### Ex-prisoners

The term prisoner and ex-prisoner are employed in the current work to refer to those who have been tried and sentenced to custody, as well as those who have been held in remand custody.<sup>11</sup> In some instances the term ‘offenders’ has been used where it is considered to give greater clarity and in its useage this term has the same meaning as ‘prisoner’ and ‘ex-prisoner’. In other instances reference has been made to ‘remandees’ where it has been necessary to create a distinction between those held in custody on remand and those sentenced to imprisonment.

The housing and non-accommodation needs of those exiting custody obviously will vary depending on the length of time a person has been incarcerated, but those who have been held for a short and/or uncertain period (such as those on remand) face specific challenges and require specific strategies in order to be overcome. For instance, the shortened timeframe in which these individuals are in contact with the prison system means they may be unable to access or derive any benefit from in-prison interventions, and they will rarely receive any form of formalised post-release supervision such as parole (see NACRO 2000 for full discussion). In some jurisdictions remandees may have access to a more limited range of programs than sentenced prisoners, in particular those who have progressed through the classification system and are being released from minimum security facilities. Persons held on remand but released without serving a term of imprisonment may never be in a position

<sup>10</sup> Perhaps the best known of which is the Level of Supervision Inventory — Revised (LSI-R; Andrews & Bonta 1995).

<sup>11</sup> The term prisoner also encompasses those individuals charged with offences, who would otherwise be bailed but because of an absence of suitable accommodation are remanded to custody. This raises issues of diversion before imprisonment (e.g. see Kiely 1999), but is a related issue of high relevance to discussions of prisoners’ accommodation needs because it highlights the cyclical nature of homelessness and contact with the criminal justice system.

to access post-release programs that could assist them with critical needs such as housing and employment.

## Homelessness

One of the impediments to gaining precise estimates of ex-prisoners experiencing homelessness is the variety of concepts which 'homelessness' can describe. In its most basic form and in commonsense parlance, homeless refers to a state of 'rooflessness', of 'sleeping rough'. However, someone can be sheltered from the elements yet still not be in a home *per se*.<sup>12</sup> For this reason, a three-tiered, culturally based definition of homelessness was developed by Chamberlain and Mackenzie (1998), which specifies:

- ▶ primary homelessness, which can be equated with being roofless, without any conventional form of accommodation;
- ▶ secondary homelessness, or movement between temporary forms of accommodation like shelters; and
- ▶ tertiary homelessness, describing that group of individuals who reside in boarding houses where there is no security of tenure and amenities fall well below what is considered acceptable by the community.

Alternatively, Fitzpatrick, Kemp and Klinker (2000, cited in Anderson 2001: 3) suggest the following circumstances as falling within a 'common sense' definition of homelessness:

- ▶ rooflessness (also termed street homelessness or 'rough sleeping');
- ▶ emergency/temporary accommodation for homeless people in hostels/night shelters;
- ▶ living long-term in institutions because no other accommodation is available;
- ▶ bed and breakfast or similar accommodation unsuitable for the long-term;
- ▶ informal, insecure or impermanent accommodation with friends, or under notice to quit, or squatting;
- ▶ intolerable physical conditions, including overcrowding; and
- ▶ involuntary sharing (such as within an abusive relationship).

As McDonald (1994: 13) notes, an individual's accommodation situation can fall anywhere along a continuum which may include having no form of shelter, to being in marginalised shelter, to being in relatively stable but poor quality accommodation, through various other levels to stable, secure and ongoing housing. To determine where along the continuum the definition of homelessness is applied, especially when this typically involves application of a concept of minimum community standard which may in itself be difficult to define, is problematic.

A broad definition of 'homelessness' encompasses both what is culturally acceptable in terms of housing, as well as the characteristics of individuals who are vulnerable

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<sup>12</sup> See Neil & Fopp (1994) for a discussion of the characteristics of a 'home', as compared with 'housing'.



to experiencing homelessness and so who should be the focus of interventions. Chamberlain and Mackenzie note that this style of service-oriented definition is typified in the *Supported Accommodation Assistance Program Act 1994*, which refers to ‘inadequate access to safe and secure housing’, where safe and secure encompasses notions of health, personal safety, marginalisation from amenities, economic and social supports, and other circumstances that can negatively impact on the adequacy, safety, security or affordability of housing. The definition therefore also effectively captures those at risk of homelessness as well as those currently without a home.

There can be significant cultural differences in what constitutes homelessness. The concept of homelessness can be culturally different for Indigenous Australians compared with some non-Indigenous concepts, and the experience of homelessness can be different for Indigenous people (Department of Family and Community Services 1999a). As discussed in detail earlier, for Indigenous people homelessness may be less related to having a roof over their head at any given point in time than having access to live with family members. Some Indigenous people see themselves as having a place to live, a home, without necessarily having any housing available to them.

For the current purposes, homelessness is used in a very general sense, to capture both people who are homeless, and who are at risk of primary, secondary and tertiary homelessness. A broader definition has been adopted in preference to a narrow one in the interests of ensuring as complete as possible a picture of the issue of ex-prisoners and homelessness is captured. This paper does not seek to draw distinctions based on culturally differing concepts of homelessness though the significance of these is acknowledged. At this point in time, there is not enough known about cultural differences to allow any real analysis based on these differences to be made.

### Recidivism

Recidivism is a term whose nuances in meanings can best be seen on a continuum. It generally refers to the resumption of criminal behaviours. However, in some contexts it refers to crimes that have been detected, apprehended and punished, whereas in others it can refer to the commission of crime, regardless of whether that crime is even observed. Methodologically, this has implications for the type of data used to assess recidivism, but in the context of broad social policy, any form of criminal activity will impact upon society, thus unless otherwise stated, it is used in its broadest sense in the current report.

Through this review, the term ‘re-offending’ has been used interchangeably with ‘recidivism’ and carries the same meaning. The term ‘return to imprisonment’ and variations have been used to indicate where recidivism or re-offending behaviour has been detected and has resulted in the offender being arrested and returned to custody.

### Reintegration

There is debate as to the appropriateness of this term, and similar terms such as ‘resettlement’ because it has been argued that by virtue of social exclusion and

socio-economic disadvantage, most prisoners have never been integrated or settled. As Dutreix (2003: 12) puts it:

Reintegration back into society assumes that one was integrated into society at some previous time. In the author's experience it has been found that many women in prison and released from prison have never felt a part of society. They were never integrated in the first place. Thus, rather than reintegration support may need to assist a woman to enter society for the first time.

No intervention can therefore return people to a state they were never previously in (see Ward 2001). The terms do, however, effectively capture what many pre- and post-release interventions aim to achieve, which is more than reduced recidivism: namely, social inclusion and active community participation.

### Transition

Like the term 'at risk', 'transition' has slightly different usage in the homelessness and post-release literatures. When a person who is experiencing homelessness is in transition, they are in the process of exiting their homeless state. Thus, they may exit from crisis accommodation to supported medium-term housing, or from supported medium-term accommodation to safe, secure, and affordable long-term housing. This implies a positive progression from homelessness to home. Within a correctional context, transition refers to the move from prison to the mainstream community. It can be a generic term simply referring to the process of unsupported or unplanned-for release, in which case it can have negative connotations because of the many challenges faced by returning prisoners and the fact that unsupported transition does little to contribute to reintegration. Alternatively, it can refer to a structured transitional process that has been designed to ease the move back into mainstream society. An example of the latter would be a specialist pre-release correctional facility, allowing a large degree of graduated and supervised contact with the community at large for suitably assessed prisoners.

## Appendix B: Public domain documents consulted for state and territory policy

- Australian Capital Territory Department of Justice and Community Safety 2003. *Annual report 2002–2003 volume 1*. Canberra: ACT Department of Justice & Community Safety accessed October 2003 [http://www.jcs.act.gov.au/eLibrary/AnnualReports/2002\\_2003/JACS\\_vol1\\_2002\\_2003.pdf](http://www.jcs.act.gov.au/eLibrary/AnnualReports/2002_2003/JACS_vol1_2002_2003.pdf)
- Australian Capital Territory Department of Justice and Community Safety 2002. *Annual report 2001–2002 volume 1*. Canberra: ACT Department of Justice & Community Safety accessed September 2003 [http://www.jcs.act.gov.au/eLibrary/AnnualReports/2001\\_2002/VOL1JACSAR2002a.pdf](http://www.jcs.act.gov.au/eLibrary/AnnualReports/2001_2002/VOL1JACSAR2002a.pdf)
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- Coleman A (Homelessness, QLD DOH) 2003. Queensland government responses to homelessness *Parity* vol 16:18–19
- Ellery S (MLA, Chairperson WA SAAP State Advisory Committee) 2003. Homelessness: not just a short-term solution. The Western Australian State homelessness strategy *Parity* vol 16: 23–25
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- Homelessness Strategy ACT 2003. *Addressing homelessness in the ACT* (pamphlet). Canberra: Housing & Community Services ACT accessed October 2003 <http://www.dhcs.act.gov.au/hcs/Services/Homelessness/Homelessbrochure.pdf>
- [Northern Territory] Home Territory 2003. *Newsletter* (pamphlet). Darwin: Department of Community Development, Sport & Cultural Affairs accessed November 2003 <http://www.nt.gov.au/cdsca/hometerritory/newsletters.pdf>
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## Report parts two and three: research with staff and ex-prisoner clients of SAAP funded agencies

### Introduction

This section of the report comprises parts two and three of ‘The provision of consultancy services in relation to research into ex-prisoners, SAAP and homelessness’. Part two involves discussions with selected SAAP service providers to provide information about perceptions of ex-prisoner usage of SAAP services including impact on other SAAP clients, while Part three involves interviews with a selected number of ex-prisoner SAAP clients to obtain qualitative information about pathways into SAAP and homelessness.

Time constraints, resource constraints and practical considerations (e.g. ability and willingness of SAAP agencies to be involved in the research, the need for agencies to approach ex-prisoner clients directly for participation, and the need to conduct interviews on-site) largely determined the methodology for this research project. As a result, it is important to note that respondents (staff and clients) in this research were not randomly selected, and that the results obtained in this research cannot be assumed to be representative of the broader SAAP sector, or of ex-prisoners in general. While this places some limitations on the conclusions which can be drawn, and the degree to which the results can be generalised to the broader population of SAAP agencies and clients, the research presented in this report provides valuable qualitative information about perceptions and pathways which can be used to feed into directions for future research into SAAP, ex-prisoners and homelessness.

### Methodology

#### **Interviews with staff of SAAP funded agencies**

As SAAP agencies are often stretched in terms of resources, and to encourage voluntary participation in the research project, an email about the project was distributed by the Australian Federation of Homelessness Organisations to its member organisations. The email provided a brief outline of the project and asked any agencies who wished to be involved to contact the researchers at the Australian Institute of Criminology by a specified date. Through this call for participation, and through word of mouth between agencies, organisations in five states expressed interest in being involved. Upon contacting the AIC, agencies were advised in further detail about the aims of the research project. In particular, agencies were advised that involvement on their part would require

- (a) a willingness by their staff members to be interviewed by an AIC researcher in person at their site, and
- (b) a willingness and the capacity for their agency to organise some of their ex-prisoner clients to be interviewed anonymously on site by an AIC researcher.

Following discussions with the AIC a number of organisations were not able to be involved, either because they did not provide services to the ex-prisoner target group or because resource constraints prevented their involvement.

After discussions and negotiations with agencies who were able to participate, six agencies in five states became actively involved in this research project. Interviews with both staff and ex-prisoner clients were conducted in the agencies' offices during November and December 2003. A profile of the agencies participating is at Appendix C.

Each of the six participating agencies facilitated interviews with members of its client group. Qualitative interviews were also conducted with staff of five six of these agencies. A total of 18 staff members were interviewed. A community corrections officer also actively participated in interviews in one location.

The instrument used to conduct qualitative interviews with staff is at Appendix D

### **Interviews with ex-prisoner clients**

Clients were approached by SAAP agency staff, advised of the research project and asked if they were willing to be interviewed. For those clients who agreed to be participate, SAAP agency staff in most instances arranged a time with clients to be at the interview location. The AIC researcher was advised by the SAAP agency staff of the interviews, times and locations, but no names were provided to the AIC researcher.

Qualitative interviews were conducted with 41 ex-prisoner clients in five states during November and December 2003. Clients were not specifically asked about their Indigenous status, however a small number referred to themselves as Indigenous during the course of the interviews. It is estimated that five of the clients interviewed were Indigenous. Thirty-nine of these interviews were conducted face-to-face while two were conducted by telephone. Face-to-face interviews were conducted either in office space provided by agencies within their business offices, or in their accommodation properties. On average, each interview took between 30 and 45 minutes to complete.

Of the 41 clients interviewed, nine were female and 32 were male. A male AIC staff member interviewed all male clients. In one location, where the agency operates both men's and women's support services, prior arrangements had been made to have a female AIC staff member visit and interview all female clients. This approach was supported by the agency as many of the female clients had experienced domestic violence and it was felt by the agency and the AIC that being interviewed by another female was highly appropriate.

The male interviewer conducted three interviews with female clients in other locations. Two of these clients had been identified and referred by their support workers (one of whom is was male) and agreed to be interviewed, fully understanding that a male would interview them. In the other case, the female client approached the male interviewer directly and explicitly agreed to be interviewed by him.

The instrument used to conduct qualitative interviews with ex-prisoner clients is at Appendix E.



## Use of vouchers

In designing the research methodology a decision was taken by the research team that all clients agreeing to be interviewed would be given compensation, in the form of a \$20 food voucher redeemable at a fast food restaurant, at the end of the interview. Noting that most interviews would take around 30 to 45 minutes, it was felt this would compensate clients for the time they had given up and any possible expense they may have incurred in travelling to an interview site. The voucher was discussed with each of the participating agencies and all agencies supported the voucher as being an appropriate compensation to clients.

The AIC Ethics Committee gave approval for a methodology that included the provision of McDonald's restaurant vouchers.

In practice a range of vouchers from different suppliers was used during the course of the interviews. For the interviews conducted in Brisbane, arrangements were made with the Retail Marketing section of McDonald's Australia's Queensland office to purchase vouchers that the interviewer collected on his way from the airport to the homeless shelter. Organising these vouchers took a degree of coordination as they could only be obtained through the Queensland head office and could only be used in a number of company-owned restaurants within the Brisbane Central Business District (CBD). The vouchers could not be used in franchised McDonald's restaurants in the CBD or any restaurants outside the CBD. As each voucher could only be used on one occasion and could not, for accounting reasons, be used in the manner of a debit card, a quantity of \$5 vouchers were purchased and four of these were given to each client who was interviewed.

Following significant difficulties in obtaining McDonalds and other fast food vouchers in other states, no further attempts were made to obtain McDonalds or other fast food restaurant vouchers.

For interviews in other locations, the interviewer purchased \$20 vouchers from Big W/Woolworth's, Target and Kmart stores. The purchase of vouchers from a range of different store chains primarily reflected a conscious decision to allow clients to receive vouchers from a store that was reasonably accessible to them. This was particularly important in one city, where the supported accommodation was in a number of geographically dispersed areas, and for the vast majority of clients in each location who did not have private transport.

The research team encountered one issue with respect to the Big W/Woolworth's vouchers, which could be redeemed at any store in the Woolworth's family, including its liquor outlets. The research team was concerned that some clients with alcohol problems could use the vouchers inappropriately. This was discussed with a number of agencies. One agency had considered this problem in the past and had a 'no alcohol' stamp, which it used on these vouchers. Another agency had also considered the problem and recognised that some of its clients used alcohol as a coping mechanism. This agency had no concerns about its clients purchasing alcohol with the vouchers if it would help them cope with the many problems these clients faced in their daily lives. The research team concluded that the main issue was that the clients were adults and entitled to make their own decisions about the

purchase of any items legally available to them. It was felt to be inappropriate to provide clients with a voucher and then dictate to them what they could and could not use it for.

It is interesting to note that the agency which used the 'no alcohol' stamp nonetheless saw any discount store or supermarket vouchers as preferable to fast food vouchers, which the agency felt would have undermined their efforts to teach their clients good nutrition and financial management practices.

The interviewers felt, and this view was strongly supported by the staff of each agency it was discussed with, that the use of some kind of voucher or similar compensation was essential to the success of this research project. While it is not possible to say with certainty, the primary interviewer felt that only around one third of the 41 interviews would have been obtained if compensation was not provided. Certainly some clients took part without knowing until after the interview they would be receiving a voucher. Some other clients remarked that they just wanted to help and would have happily done the interview anyway. At the same time it was apparent that a considerable number of clients would not have made themselves available if they did not receive compensation for it. Agency staff also commented that the vouchers were a great incentive to participation and it was much easier for them to facilitate the interviews once clients became aware that compensation was being offered.

### **Implications from use of vouchers**

In research of this kind involving ex-prisoners, any ethical issues that arise from the offering of compensation must be balanced with a range of other considerations. It needs to be recognised that most ex-prisoners have been asked to talk about themselves, their actions and their experiences on numerous occasions. Through the legal process, through case management and programs conducted in prison and through the interactions with support services, ex-prisoners may have been repeatedly asked about these aspects of their lives. Many may be tired of feeling they are being scrutinised, answering questions and talking about themselves. Many may simply want to leave their offences and imprisonment behind them and focus on their future. Through their experiences many ex-prisoners are wary of strangers and anyone they perceive as an authority figure and may be suspicious of a researcher's motives.

Prisoners and ex-prisoners are the focus of a significant amount of research and some potential interview subjects may have already been interviewed by researchers, perhaps recently. During the current research, the interviewer encountered a number of clients who had recently been interviewed for research on other components of the SAAP evaluation. Ex-prisoners who have already recently given up their time for research may be reluctant to do so again without compensation.

In the present case the research team felt the provision of compensation, in the form of gift vouchers, was an integral part of securing the quantity and variety of interviews obtained for this research. The cost of the vouchers must also be balanced against the significant potential benefits to be gained from the information obtained during these interviews.

### **Importance of anonymity**

Given the possible wariness and suspicion of ex-prisoners it was also critical that the interviewers assured the clients of the confidentiality and anonymity of the information they gave. Of particular importance was the reassurances given before the interview that the client would not be asked about their offences or their experiences in prison. Clients were also assured they were not expected to talk about anything they found uncomfortable and could choose not to answer any question. It was apparent that these assurances were very important to some clients, who would likely not have participated if they were asked about aspects of their offending or imprisonment history. The involvement of staff in giving clients these same assurances was also critical to securing their participation.

Although clients were not asked anything specifically about their offences, and were assured they did not have to speak about them, many clients voluntarily spoke of their offending. No client spoke in detail about any offences, but a number talked about their drug use histories, or about having stolen to get money for illicit drugs, food or accommodation. A small number of clients made reference to having committed violent offences but did not discuss these in detail.

## **Results of interviews with staff of SAAP funded agencies**

### **Agency consent**

Each of the agencies participating in this study has provided written consent to being identified in this report as a participating agency. References to specific agencies have nonetheless been kept to a minimum and particular agencies have been identified only where doing so was considered reasonably necessary for clarification and understanding of the material presented.

### **Nature of the participating agencies**

It is important to note that the six agencies participating in this research represent only a very small proportion of the nearly 1300 SAAP funded agencies in Australia. These were agencies that responded to requests for agencies to be involved in the research and it appears that in most cases their willingness to be involved was at least partly linked to a specific interest or focus on ex-prisoner clients. In this sense the agencies are not representative of the much larger group of SAAP agencies that do not provide services to ex-prisoner clients, or are not necessarily mindful of the presence of ex-prisoners amongst their client group.

The agencies participating in this research only represent some of the service delivery models operating under SAAP. Most of the participating agencies are identified in SAAP administrative data as operating under multiple service delivery models, including accommodation (of varying duration from crisis/short-term to longer-term), daily living support, advice and advocacy and general assistance. One of the agencies operates a medium–longer term accommodation service delivery model, one operates a day support model and one operates an outreach service delivery model alongside its multiple service model.

Two of the agencies are identified in SAAP data as having single men as a primary target group, even though one of these agencies also operates a women's accommodation and support service which also assists women and children escaping domestic violence. Two agencies are shown with families as their primary target group. The remaining two agencies are indicated as having a 'general' primary target group, even though one appears to primarily target single men and also operates a women's service.

The agencies are not in this sense representative of those that operate under more specific accommodation models, or those that concentrate on service delivery models that do not incorporate accommodation. For example, while one agency in this study operated under a day support model and one partly operated under an outreach model, these two agencies cannot be representative of the much larger group of agencies operating under these service delivery models or under models such as telephone referral or those agencies that provide support to, and representation of, other agencies. Nor are these agencies representative of those targeting young people or indeed, given the small numbers involved, representative of the broader group of agencies with common target groups.

Due to time and resource constraints for this project, and the need for involvement by SAAP agencies who were willing and able to devote time and resources to the project, it was not intended that the interviews conducted in this study would be representative of the broader SAAP sector. Rather, it was hoped that the interviews with agency staff and clients would provide insight into some of the issues faced by ex-prisoner clients and agencies which deal with ex-prisoner clients. The findings could then feed into directions for future research.

## **Challenges in providing services to ex-prisoner clients**

During the interviews, staff were asked what they saw as the major challenges in providing services to ex-prisoners, both to the individuals and to the agency. They were asked firstly about the challenges in providing accommodation services and were then asked a follow-up question about the challenges in providing other, non-accommodation services such as employment assistance or financial management support. Staff were then asked how these challenges were different from those affecting other client groups.

Across the set of interviews, the answers given to these questions tended to cross-over and intersect with one another. In some cases it was not necessarily possible to separate the challenges arising in accommodation services with those arising in other services. For those agencies servicing only ex-prisoners or other criminal justice system clients, the question of differences in the challenges was not applicable while for others many of the challenges were structural and not necessarily related to the characteristics of the client. In reporting on the themes emerging from this part of the interview it is therefore more appropriate and meaningful to seek to categorise the themes arising across the set of questions.

## Structural challenges

### **Accommodation supply and public housing waiting lists**

Agencies were consistent in seeing a lack of available and affordable accommodation options as a major challenge to addressing homelessness among ex-prisoners. Demand was seen as continuously exceeding supply.

While agencies were generally positive about the efforts made by state housing organisations, particularly operational staff within these organisations, they also highlighted problems arising from decreases in public housing stocks. This was perceived as a problem in a number of states.

It is interesting that during the period the interviews were being conducted, an article appeared in the *Adelaide Advertiser* (2/12/2003: 17) about the decline in public housing availability in that state. The article noted that 5,624 properties had been sold from public housing stocks in the six years to the end of 2002/03. Only 904 new properties had been built by the Housing Trust between 2000/01 and 2003/04. The article also noted that 9,000 new applications for public housing were lodged in 2002/03 while the waiting list for housing reached 26,670 in that year. The South Australian Housing Minister was quoted in that article as saying that properties were being sold to meet budgetary shortfalls arising from the Commonwealth diverting funding from subsidising public housing to providing rental assistance, and a 30 percent reduction in grants over the last decade.

One reason for the decline in public housing stocks appears to be the redevelopment of urban areas, particularly inner suburbs. In many areas old housing, some of which is public housing, is being removed to make way for new, typically high cost, residential accommodation. Even where public housing agencies have plans to replace this housing with new stock there is usually a considerable period of time before stock is replaced. This problem may be compounded where city councils move to 'clean up' city centres by moving homeless people and other 'social problems' away from the public view. This can lead to a congregation of disadvantaged people in particular city fringe areas, straining services in those areas.

Reductions in the relative supply levels of public housing are one of the factors resulting in very long waiting lists for public housing. For those not meeting the criteria for priority housing, waiting lists appear to typically be in the order of several years. To be able to access public housing within a shorter period of time, clients need to be eligible for the category having the highest priority. Definitions of the highest priority category and its eligibility criteria vary from one jurisdiction to another, but generally require clients to have been homeless for a period of around two years or be experiencing other significant aspects of disadvantage, such as having a disability. In some jurisdictions it can be very hard for ex-prisoners to achieve highest priority eligibility. Some jurisdictions consider imprisonment as stable housing, and therefore consider that the required period of homelessness only begins when the person is released from prison. In other cases, the documentation and verification requirements are particularly onerous and make it very difficult for ex-prisoner clients to establish eligibility and enter waiting lists.

A separate challenge faced by agencies in relation to public housing relates to clients who fall behind in their rent. In some cases staff have put in considerable effort to work with housing agency staff securing accommodation only to see the client fall behind in rent and be evicted. This creates a cycle where the agency again has to try and work with the housing organisation to place the client back in housing. It would be preferable for support staff if they had more opportunity to work with the housing organisation to ensure the client remains in housing and solutions are found to resolve the rent problems. One staff member noted that there was nothing more soul destroying for a supported accommodation worker than to apply intense support to a client, phase this down to medium support, have the client placed in public housing and achieve stability, only to have the client encounter a problem and return to the beginning of the support process again.

It is not just public or community housing shortages that serve to restrict access to exit points. A number of staff members referred to rising private rental prices as a significant barrier to any person on a limited income accessing the private rental market. This added another layer of difficulty to the problems already experienced by ex-prisoners trying to overcome stigmatisation problems and secure private rental accommodation, as discussed elsewhere in this report.

A major issue in Bunbury, WA is a lack of private boarding house accommodation resulting from redevelopment similar to that affecting public housing stocks. An area of town adjoining the city centre which had previously held a number of boarding houses has been redeveloped in recent years with much of the area now taken up with luxury housing. Options for disadvantaged people in Bunbury are now very limited, with only one boarding house remaining in the city. While this problem was unique within this study, it is likely being experienced in similar ways in many regional areas of Australia. Staff in one of the capital cities also noted that many of the cheap boarding houses in that city were being renovated and priced out of the reach of people on low incomes.

It is interesting to note that the redevelopment issue in Bunbury was also having implications for the service itself, which was facing a possible loss of its site of operations to make way for a newer development.

Shortages of long-term affordable housing and waiting periods mean that support agencies must find ways of providing accommodation in the medium-term until appropriate exit points can be found. This can put a considerable strain on agency resources which rely on clients exiting into external long-term housing to allow other clients to enter their programs. The ability of clients to exit from supported accommodation is also important for the clients themselves as this represents a significant milestone in their progress.

### **Agency resources**

The availability of ongoing funding and the ability to procure appropriate resources are significant issues for agencies in this sector. These issues are likely not specific to the accommodation sector and it is expected that all social welfare agencies would be experiencing similar problems. However these are issues of major concern to the ability of agencies to provide effective outcomes for ex-prisoner clients and

therefore it is important to include mention of it in this report. It is also important because of the way in which appropriate support appears to very significantly affect the prospects for ex-prisoners re-entering the community and therefore the way in which it affects outcomes for the criminal justice system and the community overall.

Concerns about resources fell into two major categories, accommodation resources and staffing resources. Agencies overall felt they needed to have more accommodation properties, and a greater variety of properties, to be able to place clients into. This would allow the agency to service a greater number of clients and thereby come closer to addressing the imbalance between supply and demand. It would also allow greater flexibility in placing clients appropriately as clients could be better matched in shared accommodation. This would help to address the problem of having to cater to clients across an age range from 18 to over 60, who were at different points of the criminality continuum. It would also mean that more clients could be housed individually where this was appropriate or necessary.

In this sense, it is noteworthy that a number of staff saw loneliness as an issue for some clients, especially if they have just come from being continuously surrounded by large numbers of people in prison. This can be short-term, resulting from the dramatic change in environment between a correctional institution and a house in the community. It can also be longer-term, with one staff member noting that the goal of independent living can be problematic for some clients for whom independence can result in social isolation. Responding to problems of loneliness and isolation may involve being able to place the client in appropriate shared accommodation, or giving the client extra support to cope with this aspect of change.

At the same time, staff have found that some clients need space and independence so are better suited to living independently or with just one other person, while some clients such as sex offenders may not be safe in a shared situation. One worker saw the ideal scenario as all clients being in single accommodation as this encourage clients to stabilise and sort their lives out but this was not necessarily a view shared by other workers.

It is apparent that the best way to address the question of whether an individual needs shared or single accommodation is for an agency to have sufficient resources available to be able to make flexible decisions that respond to individual needs.

The other resource concern was in the area of staffing, with a number of agencies expressing the need for more workers to properly meet support needs. Agencies have had to find ways around this problem, such as CRC which has had to create a position of women's support worker from existing resources to meet the gap in this area of service provision, or in other cases where existing staff have simply had to accept a greater burden to meet clients' needs.

Some agencies note however that resource limitations mean they have no choice but to simply refuse support and assistance to a lot of potential clients because they do not have enough beds or other resources available.

### **Accessing other services**

Staff in a number of agencies saw accessing services offered by other agencies as problematic, both for themselves and for clients. Staff suggested that while their networks with other agencies, particularly at the individual level, were very good and other agencies worked hard to provide the best services they could, staff were constrained by resource issues and lack of information about other services.

Staff in some agencies felt there was simply a lack of other alternative services available, either to meet particular needs their own agency did not address or to cope with levels of demand that exceeded their resources. The question of particular gaps in service is addressed later in this report. Some staff felt that while there were no particular gaps in service, and there were Government or non-Government services available to meet the needs, clients did not necessarily know about them. There was a perception of a lack of knowledge about services among clients, though it is not necessarily easy to determine whether this was due to individuals not being able to access information, or choosing not to access it.

Some staff felt there was also a lack of information among staff and agencies themselves. One staff member said he had been surprised a number of times to 'stumble across' agencies providing services which his clients could have used in the past, except that he was not aware that the service existed. This staff member found this particularly surprising given his lengthy experience in the sector and otherwise very effective information networks.

Accessing other agencies can be very frustrating for clients, particularly when they are 'shunted around' from one agency to another and have to access a number of agencies to meet basic needs, such as needing different agencies for accommodation, food, fares and transportation and clothing. This was not an issue for those agencies providing individually case managed and intensive support able to meet all these needs. For other agencies, the need for clients to access multiple services was not only frustrating but created the potential for abuse of the system, where clients accessing separate services from different agencies could also access duplicated services.

Staff in affected agencies saw the need for greater communication between agencies providing related services, possibly in the form of an integrated client database, to address problems of service abuse but recognised the considerable resource, infrastructure and privacy issues that would arise.

Another suggestion was that the sector aim to have greater co-location of community services, ideally so that all services a client might need were within walking distance of each other.

### **Release dates**

A number of staff indicated difficulties with planning services due to vagaries in prisoner release dates. In many cases prisoners will not know in advance whether they are going to be released on their parole eligibility dates. Even when agencies are working with prisoners in the time before they are released, it may be difficult to establish accurately when a prisoner is going to be released. In many cases agencies



must allocate beds in anticipation of parole being granted and may then be stuck with an unallocated bed, that could have been given to another potential client, if parole is refused.

The uncertainty surrounding release dates can also create frustrations for the prisoners themselves who are hampered in their ability to even attempt to arrange accommodation in advance of their release.

### Client-related challenges

Much of the challenge for agencies comes from the specific characteristics and needs of their clients, and the particular issues the clients face in trying to re-enter or establish themselves in the community. Some of these issues are specific to ex-prisoners while others relate more generally to people facing homelessness.

#### **Stigmatisation**

Many staff members saw stigmatisation and labelling as a major problem confronting ex-prisoner clients. They saw that ex-prisoners may be treated differently by real estate agencies, landlords or employers with opportunities for accommodation or employment being cut off once the person's criminal record became known. Ex-prisoners may also be treated differently by others in the community and face problems establishing social relationships. This could become an issue for agencies offering shared accommodation to both 'mainstream' and ex-prisoner clients, with clients who had not been to prison sometimes refusing to be accommodated with ex-prisoners. This then impacted on the agencies' deployment of their limited accommodation resources.

Stigmatisation creates significant challenges for agencies which must nonetheless help clients find longer-term sustainable housing, despite many possible avenues of accommodation being cut-off from them. This is also the case with employment, and while assistance with securing employment is in some ways a separate issue to accommodation, the two are very closely inter-related. Some staff contended that accommodation and employment were the two most important and fundamental issues for people re-entering the community. As one worker put it, ongoing employment is the key to independent living, which is the best outcome for most, if not all, services. Other workers noted that being employed tends to put clients in a different and more positive peer group, while another noted the very positive influences one employed client in a shared house or hostel can have on other residents.

The experience of stigmatisation and labelling can also be damaging to clients' self-esteem and their willingness to persist with the sometimes difficult process of re-entering the community. In interviews with clients, many of them talked about feeling like they had walked out of prison 'with a sign on their heads' and were very conscious of being treated differently in the community. How much of this differential treatment genuinely occurred and how much was perception is probably irrelevant, as perceptions of ill-treatment can themselves be highly damaging, and are magnified by any genuine ill-treatment.

Agency staff report that problems of stigmatisation and self-esteem deficits that result from it can be very persistent. Ex-prisoner clients know that their offending and imprisonment history will remain with them and affect all their social relations for many years to come. Ex-prisoners often do not feel a part of the mainstream community, to the point of feeling a total detachment from the community. Staff of one agency suggested that those who come to feel entirely detached are the same group of ex-prisoners, some 70 per cent of those leaving prison, who ultimately end up returning to the criminal justice system and often back into social welfare assistance.

It is partly due to these feelings of detachment that many former prisoners tend to gravitate towards associations with other former prisoners. While this can lead to problems as indicated elsewhere, it can also provide supportive benefits. Compared to others in the community, former prisoners are more likely to be non-judgemental and accepting of other former prisoners and more understanding of the issues they face.

It is important to note that the stigmatisation, prejudice and differential treatment experienced by ex-prisoners are experienced even more strongly by Indigenous ex-prisoners, who face discrimination due to their cultural status as well as their criminal history. Indigenous people are also relatively more likely to be coming from severely disadvantaged backgrounds and may have been victims of family violence or sexual assault. Given the over-representation of Indigenous people in our correctional systems, the difficulties faced by Indigenous ex-prisoners cannot be underestimated.

### **Blacklisting**

In some ways related to the problem of stigmatisation, staff often found efforts to assist clients into private rental accommodation difficult as clients have been 'blacklisted' as a result of previous tenancy problems. Clients may be listed on Internet-based databases as problem tenants and real estate agents or landlords who subscribe to these databases may refer to them when assessing tenancy applications.

While staff did not appear to dispute the rights of landlords and real estate agents to protect their financial interests, they were concerned that clients could be blacklisted without any burden of proof placed on landlords or agents. They contended it can be very difficult for clients to know they are blacklisted, unless they pay to access the service, and they do not get any opportunity to put their side of the story or dispute what may be an unfair listing. Staff noted that it could be almost impossible for clients to get off the blacklist, even if they resolved problems from their former tenancy or had addressed the circumstances that led to the problems. Staff also expressed concerns over whether this information infringed clients' privacy rights.

An examination of the website operated by TICA, which states that it has the largest membership of any online tenancy information service in Australia, shows that tenants can be recorded as having defaulted on a tenancy agreement. There are 14 reasons listed why a tenant may be recorded as being a default tenant, including having rent in arrears, having entered into a payment arrangement or having presented

dishonoured cheques for rental payment. Non-financial reasons for listing include breaching the Residential Tenancy Act, having a Residential Tenancy Tribunal order made against the tenant, failing to provide adequate notice or damaging property. There does not appear to be any discretion between levels of default, such as very minor breaches or minor Tribunal orders which may have occurred alongside orders in the Tenant's favour.

To comply with privacy requirements, clients can find out if they are listed as default tenants either by writing to TICA, accompanied by a bank cheque or money order payment of \$11.00, or by ringing the TICA hotline at a cost of \$5.45 per minute (higher from pay phones). A client on a very limited budget may find these costs prohibitive and may not be aware of their right to seek this information.

Where a landlord has listed a person as a default tenant but the landlord does not specify that there is a monetary amount involved, that listing will remain on TICA for three years. After three years the listing will be removed, but only once the landlord has confirmed there is no money owing. If this is confirmed and the default listing removed, the client remains listed on TICA indefinitely with a 'Tenancy History Only' listing. This would strongly suggest to any future landlord there has been a past problem with this tenant. If the landlord does not provide the necessary confirmation it appears the default listing remains indefinitely.

Where a monetary amount is specified to TICA the tenant remains listed as a default tenant for five years from the time the debt is cleared. After five years, the tenant remains listed as 'Tenancy History Only'. Removal of a default listing in this case relies on advice being provided by the landlord of the debt having been cleared. If this advice is not forthcoming, or the debt has not been cleared, the tenant will remain listed as a defaulter indefinitely. The website advises clients it would be in their best interest not to fall into this part of the system.

Any disputes over whether a tenant should be listed on the TICA system can only be resolved by the tenant approaching the landlord to resolve the matter and the landlord advising TICA to remove the listing, or the tenant proving to TICA that the listing was vindictive. To do this a tenant must provide the allegation and proof to TICA who will seek a comment on the allegation from its member landlord. TICA will then determine whether the listing was vindictive.

### **Starting over**

For many people leaving prison, re-entering the community means starting over from a position of having effectively nothing. As well as not having stable accommodation, ex-prisoners may have no money other than a Centrelink payment, no furniture or household goods and little clothing. Returning to the community, especially after a long term of imprisonment, may be very confusing and disorienting as the person tries to adjust to changes in the community, including changes in infrastructure, transport systems, technology and prices. Ex-prisoners may also have to adjust to changes in community norms and expectations, or changes in Government policy.

For ex-prisoners who are seeking to make a genuine effort towards change, and seeking to address their offending behaviour, starting over may well mean leaving

behind negative past associations. This can be difficult, especially in areas where there is little accommodation available other than in areas of socio-economic disadvantage where clients' negative associations tend to be congregated. While leaving behind past associations may lessen the chances that a client may face temptations or coercion leading to offending behaviour, it also means trying to establish new friendships and social networks as well as adjusting to living in a new area.

Coupled with these challenges is the fact that offenders face considerable financial difficulties on release from prison. Generally they will have barely enough money for basic food and transport and perhaps rent in a shelter or cheap boarding house. Unless they have independent resources they will not have money for rental bonds, gas or electricity bonds or to purchase basic household items. Items like furniture and whitegoods are especially out of reach without financial assistance.

For both support workers and clients, the challenges of starting over can be overwhelming. Threats to a client's self-esteem that come from having no material possessions and no place in society can lead to problems including depression, drug use and a return to old associations. Countering these problems requires clients to have access to adequate agency resources, a variety of types of support and appropriate programs.

### **Institutionalisation**

Many staff members saw institutionalisation as a major challenge in dealing with ex-prisoner clients. The experience of imprisonment, especially multiple or lengthy periods, can cause prisoners to adjust to life in an institutional setting to the detriment of their capacity to function outside that environment. The prison environment generally involves rigid routines and rules, with strict behavioural controls. Prisoners may find themselves in specific roles within the prison such as having very specific and narrow work responsibilities. Prisoners may also have to adjust their behaviour and perceptions in response to what may be continuous threats of violence from other prisoners, whether overt or otherwise. In a correctional setting, prisoners will generally have no responsibility or discretion in most daily living activities, such as deciding what to eat and when and how to budget or manage finances. Prisoners are also clearly not able to decide, other than within very limited constraints, where and how they will spend their time.

On release from prison, this all changes. Ex-prisoners are faced with an environment without routines and strict rules and where they have to make decisions they may not have made for a long time or, in some cases, ever made at all. Ex-prisoners must learn to manage a very limited budget and manage nutritional and hygiene needs that simply were not an issue for them before. Outside the prison environment, ex-prisoners must learn to relate to the people around them with interactions significantly different from those they needed to get by in dealing with correctional staff and other prisoners. Learning the appropriate balance of trust, suspicion and awareness while maintaining appropriate respect and courtesy can be a challenge for anyone, but even more so when the balances needed for survival in prison can be very different from those expected in the general community.

Staff report that ex-prisoner clients react to the challenges arising from institutionalisation in different ways. Some clients will maintain immaculate standards of hygiene, cleanliness and tidiness in their home environments while others will tend towards being squalid and unclean and having no regard for their hygiene or home environment. Staff report there tends to be very little middle ground, with most clients falling into one of these two extremes. Other staff report extremes in the demeanour of ex-prisoners, with some being highly subservient and others being rebellious or confrontational, particularly when dealing with authority figures. Some may have developed highly manipulative behaviours while others tend to be very vulnerable and gullible. Some ex-prisoners may have very impaired judgement or a very poor ability to make decisions. Others have an exaggerated fear of failure, or have developed very little tolerance for coping with crisis, through having spent much of their life living on the edge of crisis.

The experience of imprisonment, together with other factors in their lives such as the effect of their offending on close relationships, can also have significant effects on an individual's motivation. Staff report that the experience may lead to some clients being highly motivated to succeed with their re-integration in order to avoid ever going back to prison. On the other hand, some clients give up hope and expect to go back to prison, so do not make any serious efforts towards re-integration. There is also no doubt that some individuals come to see prison as a preferable environment to life in the community and accept deprivation of their liberty in exchange for the comfort of the prison routine, regular meals and not having to make decisions or deal with the challenges of living in the community.

For many ex-prisoners the removal of constraints on their time and activities, coupled with a lack of financial resources, can result in boredom. Responding to boredom can have considerable deleterious effects and may lead to ex-prisoners committing offences to relieve the boredom or returning to old associations which in turn can lead to further offending and drug or alcohol use.

The effects of institutionalisation may also mean that ex-prisoners do not have basic, daily living skills. Many clients need considerable assistance with budgeting and financial management, especially given their very limited incomes. They may also need assistance with such things as cooking, shopping, cleanliness and other aspects of home maintenance. Where agencies are able to provide intensive levels of support this may include social and recreational activities.

One possible outcome of institutionalisation and the difficulties of adjusting to life outside the institution is that some people may re-offend intentionally to return to prison. Both staff and clients spoke of cases they knew of where ex-prisoners found the safety and structure offered by the prison environment preferable to trying to get by in the community. One worker noted the very high level of fear amongst homeless people forced to live on the streets and who are subject to violence, theft and sexual assault.

A number of staff, as well as several clients, saw half-way houses as one option for dealing with some of the issues arising from institutionalisation as well as a way of increasing options for adapting services to individual needs. Half-way houses were

seen as providing the opportunity to strike a transitional balance in a controlled environment with rules and structure while also allowing a degree of independence and decision making.

### **Short-term sentences and community based orders**

Of the clients interviewed for this study, it can be loosely stated that those who appeared to have the best prospects for longer-term success and those who were able to access the most beneficial overall support, were those referred to supporting agencies under the terms of a community based order. Involvement with the supporting agency was often a condition of a parole order or a home detention order. These clients were able to receive mandated support and may have been eligible to participate in pre-release programs. Typically they also began receiving support immediately on their release, some being collected at the prison gates by a support worker. Importantly, the immediacy of this support meant that the prisoner was not trying to get by alone during the critical days and weeks after release.

Staff, and clients themselves, felt that potential outcomes were far less positive for ex-prisoners not released under the terms of community based orders. These may be people released after serving a period of remand, or released from court on bail, or released after serving relatively short sentences without a parole period. They may also be people who served longer sentences with a parole period, but who were not release on parole but served their full sentence. In any of these cases, people will be released from custody without any form of prescribed supervision or parameters surrounding where they will live or whether or not they will receive treatment or take part in offending related programs.

While these offenders receive the benefits of greater liberty than those who must live under supervisory conditions, this liberty often comes at a very high price for the individual. Offenders exiting prison without support from an agency, family or appropriate friends, and without accommodation or employment arranged, have to rely largely on themselves to cope with the problems of institutionalisation and the dramatic challenges faced in returning to the community. Ex-prisoners in this situation may not have the means or knowledge to put themselves in contact with welfare agencies or support services.

While parole or community corrections supervision is part of the corrections system and may be perceived negatively by many prisoners, it does serve to provide a structure to the lives of ex-prisoners and 'forces their hand' to utilise support services, or treatment programs. The parole officer may also provide a valuable form of support, guidance, mentoring and motivation. Many ex-prisoner clients on supervision orders identified their parole officer as an important form of support in their efforts towards community integration.

As noted by a number of staff, as well as clients, the period immediately following release is critical for a released prisoner. During this time a person is highly vulnerable to falling back into associations or activities that may lead to drug or alcohol use, or into situations where temptations or conflicts may result in offending behaviour. The shock of re-entering the community, especially if faced with immediate homelessness and poverty, may be too difficult for a newly released prisoner to adjust to without

structured support. Even a period of one day without support can be enough to move an offender inexorably towards a return to imprisonment.

As well as a lack of support, prisoners released without community based orders may experience a range of other difficulties. People may be released from court on bail, or from remand or full-time custody, in areas far from home without money for accommodation or transport. Prisoners in remand or serving short sentences are unlikely to be able to access pre-release programs or fully make use of welfare services within the prison. Yet even a short period in custody can result in the loss of any existing accommodation, employment and possibly familial and personal relationships.

Certainly, not all unsupported or short-term prisoners will re-offend or find themselves in marginalised situations. There were some clients in this study who were able to access support services some time after their release. Some ex-prisoners may receive intensive personal support and still re-offend. One agency noted cases where prisoners had been released having satisfied corrections that they had stable accommodation to go to, only to become homeless a few days later when that accommodation fell through.

There is nonetheless sufficient evidence from this study to highlight the importance of having immediate, structured support for as many prisoners as possible. While the cost of this support can be very high, it must be balanced by the cost to the criminal justice system and the community by recidivist offending. As one staff member saw it, the justice system expunges its duty of care when care is still required and, he said, there is no doubt a strong link between offending and abandonment of released prisoners by the system.

### **Mental health issues and complexity of needs**

A number of staff identified mental health issues as a major challenge in providing accommodation and other services. Many ex-prisoner clients present with problems such as depression and anxiety while one staff member estimated that 85 per cent of women being supported by her agency have Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) as a result of domestic violence and abuse. Agencies are not equipped to provide the services needed to deal with these sorts of problems and find specialist mental health services lacking in some areas. Many ex-prisoners also present with intellectual disability issues which can interfere with their ability to deal with daily living problems and integration with the community.

The problem is compounded by the shift of mental health treatment and care responsibilities from institutions to the community. Staff indicate this has placed a great deal more people with mental health problems into situations of homelessness and contact with the criminal justice system and accordingly increased the complexity of servicing the area of homelessness.

As well as mental health and intellectual disabilities, staff suggested ex-prisoners are more likely than other client groups to present with infectious disease problems and histories of homelessness, abuse and institutionalisation. This was borne out within the limited client group interviewed for this study, a number of who reported

childhood sexual abuse, and institutionalisation beginning in young childhood. While other people experiencing homelessness, who are not ex-prisoners, tend to exhibit similar problems they do not necessarily present the range or complexity of problems that workers often find in ex-prisoner clients. Compared with other clients, ex-prisoners are also considered more likely to exhibit high levels of dependence and vulnerability and a lack of family and social networks. The lack of networks is particularly seen among drug users. Ex-prisoners also exhibit high levels of illiteracy.

### **Transient nature of the client group**

Within the area of ex-prisoner homelessness, the population can be highly transient, moving between locations and perhaps in and out of the prison system. In these circumstances it can be difficult to plan long-term interventions, especially counselling interventions. This may mean that a worker does not necessarily get to complete a process of work and must be creative about how to pace and set up interventions.

### **Women and children**

Women experiencing, or at risk, of homelessness pose an additional set of challenges, especially when they have dependent children. Most women in situations of housing crisis have experienced domestic violence. They may be traumatised by this violence, or it may have contributed to drug use and other problems. For many of these women their only option other than homelessness may be to return to the home and relationship where the domestic violence occurred. If the male perpetrator is in prison or otherwise not living in the home, the women may still have to face the prospect of him returning to the home. It may even be that the man is taken into custody for the assaults he has committed, but then be bailed and released back to the home. One male client in this study reported that this had happened to him and he had no choice but to remain in custody or return to the home where he had been assaulting his wife.

In many areas there is a lack of accommodation options for women leaving prison or escaping violence other than refuges, which some staff see as another form of institution. As women are represented in the prison system in far smaller numbers than men, far fewer resources may be allocated to their welfare. While some staff members reported initiatives and resources had been put in place that had improved the situation for women, and in some cases made it better than that for men, in other jurisdictions agencies faced considerable difficulties in finding suitable accommodation and other supports for female clients.

These difficulties are compounded when the woman has dependent children. While in some respects there are more options for women with children, or they may have greater access to priority public housing, in other respects the problems become even more difficult. Many women lose custody or access to their children when they are imprisoned, even if they are only imprisoned for short periods of time. They may be required to address drug use problems and gain stable accommodation. In one agency staff noted that a number of their clients had experienced a 'vicious cycle' resulting from their children being taken into care while they were in prison. These



clients were told they could not have their children back until they found long-term house accommodation. At the same time, the state housing organisation would not allocate the women a house because they did not have the children living with them.

### **Individual choices**

A challenge voiced by a number of staff, particularly those not directly providing supported accommodation, was dealing with individual choices that militated against working towards establishment in mainstream society. Some staff questioned how to deal with those individuals who had consciously chosen a lifestyle that included welfare dependence or drug-use, or both. While it was not suggested these choices were being made by other than a small proportion of clients, these clients presented challenges the agencies could not easily address.

Another staff member discussed how it was difficult to get clients to take the 'hard road' to sustained lifestyle change, rather than the 'easy road' of welfare dependence.

### **Conclusions — challenges in servicing ex-prisoner clients**

There is not necessarily anything surprising in the findings that many people face considerable difficulties when leaving prison, and welfare agencies face considerable challenges in supporting them. The challenges that arise in providing services to ex-prisoners are not necessarily unique to this client group, but many of them are. It is apparent that ex-prisoner clients typically have complex needs. They may have extensive histories of disadvantage and institutionalisation and lifestyles that can lead easily into crisis and repeat homelessness or re-offending. The experience of being imprisoned can contribute to problems of institutionalisation and loss of accommodation or property and can lead to discrimination when ex-prisoners try to secure accommodation or employment.

The particular issues that arise with ex-prisoner clients strongly suggest the need for dedicated resources to meet the needs of this client group. These resources should include support workers who understand the particular issues that ex-prisoners present and face, and trained and experienced support workers to respond to these. There is also a need for a range of accommodation options to support the differing needs of individual clients, including those presenting with mental health issues, and to allow flexibility for agencies.

Clearly these resources exist through the agencies participating in this study, as well as others who were not able to be involved. There is nonetheless a need for greater application of resources, perhaps most appropriately through the expansion of existing agencies that have developed the expertise and knowledge needed to service ex-prisoner clients. Certainly any significant expansion of resources carries with it a significant cost. While this cannot be in any way disregarded, it needs to be balanced against the also very significant direct and indirect costs to the community of re-offending.

The views expressed by staff suggest that there is a need for greater support for people released after serving sentences or periods in remand custody. This could come

from within the corrections system, or through external agencies being resourced to access and offer support to a greater proportion of prisoners approaching release.

Either approach would meet some difficult challenges. Aside from the issue of cost and resources, any attempts to intervene with prisoners being released unconditionally could interfere with the sentencing determinations handed down by the court. There is also likely to be a very high proportion of prisoners who have no interest in receiving support, or who might see any attempts at support as being an extension of their deprivation of liberty. Nonetheless, the problems faced by people leaving custody without supervision or support are substantial enough to merit further consideration of possible interventions.

### **Impacts of ex-prisoner clients on service provision**

Staff in each agency were asked whether their provision of services to ex-prisoner clients was impacting in any way on their provision of services to other, non ex-prisoner clients.

With very limited exceptions, the impact of ex-prisoner clients was not an issue for staff. A number of the agencies involved in the research specifically targeted ex-prisoners as their core business, so for them there was no question of any deleterious impacts.

Any impacts reported were minimal and of relatively little concern to staff. Staff members in one agency noted that many ex-prisoners request to live alone, or request not to live with other ex-prisoners. This can reduce available accommodation as one person is taking up a property that could have been used for two clients. The particular issues faced by ex-prisoners also meant that it could be difficult to match people up in shared accommodation. Another staff member, in a state where the public housing organisation regards imprisonment as stable accommodation, said that because ex-prisoners do not necessarily meet public housing criteria they may have to remain in supported accommodation for a long time and 'block up' properties for other clients. This staff member also noted that ex-prisoner clients need more intensive support than others and may cause tenancy problems by not being 'house ready' and not able to properly look after properties.

All other staff, regardless of the type of agency they worked in, reported that the impact of ex-prisoner clients was not an issue and all clients received equitable access to services. It should be noted that, as the number of agencies involved in this research was small and several of the agencies involved in the research specifically targeted ex-prisoners, the finding of minimal impact on other client groups may not be representative of other agencies which cater to other types of target groups.

### **Perceptions of assistance for serving prisoners**

Staff members and workers participating in interviews were asked their understanding, or perception, of the programs, advice, information and other services available inside the prison system to help prisoners with finding accommodation. This question did not seek to establish in any way a definitive summary of forms of assistance available

to prisoners in different institutions or jurisdictions. If this was the nature of the information sought it could have been better gained by accessing other research on the topic or surveying corrections agencies. Rather the research team was seeking to establish the perceptions and opinions of SAAP agency staff on the basis that the perceptions of staff would be reflective of the information presented to them by prisoners leaving the system. In turn, this should give an indication of what available services prisoners are accessing and how this is assisting them in approaching life outside the prison.

As anticipated, the perceptions of staff in this area varied between jurisdictions. In New South Wales, CRC noted that it promotes itself with welfare officers and the Probation and Parole Service. The agency tends to get referrals from only some of the state's prisons, despite being a State-wide service. It was noted that there was a large strain placed on Welfare Officers throughout the correctional system who tend to be overloaded with work.

Another agency also noted that Centrelink and the state housing organisation as well as various welfare services go into prisons to assist people approaching release, but this was up to Welfare Officers to organise. It was indicated that there were pre-release programs and treatment groups in most prisons, which some prisoners choose to use and others not. There were also avenues of assistance within the correctional system if prisoners chose to or were able to access them.

In Queensland workers recognised they had no specific knowledge of what assistance was available to prisoners, but had the perception that there was not a lot available. Staff were not sure whether there was not much available, or their clients had chosen not to use it, but that information from clients suggested they had received very little assistance.

In South Australia, OARS SA noted its own work in providing information and assessment services. Staff noted the importance of being able to see clients in prison on a number of occasions across the period leading up to their release so that clients can be properly assessed and be offered appropriate accommodation and levels of support. With male clients, staff felt it important not to offer prisoners too many things in the way of support as they often tended to see this as an imposition on their impending liberty and backed away from support. With female clients, the agency cannot offer direct accommodation but looks at other options for support and works in with another community service, which provides direct accommodation services and also provides an in-prison service. OARS SA workers noted that prison staff were familiar with the agency's work through its reputation and long history and tended to 'leave them to it'.

OARS SA also facilitates an 'expo' in the women's prison with various agencies setting up information stalls where the women are able to move around to talk with agency staff. These agencies cover a wide range of support services including health, finances, drug and alcohol, resolving child-related issues, education and domestic violence. Staff felt allowing the female prisoners to move around and talk with staff on their own terms was very important in terms of giving prisoners an information base and meant they were much more likely to access services on release. The

service is also working on an arrangement with the state housing organisation to visit prisoners and sort out public housing problems such as debts and rental arrears before people are released.

OARS SA also noted that the South Australian government has recently established a Social Inclusion Unit to address issues of homelessness and education among releasing prisoners. Significantly, the initiative will allow support to be given on a throughcare basis to people leaving prison without supervision orders. At the same time, staff noted the very high levels of remand in South Australia and that remand prisoners are not able to access many forms of assistance, such as pre-release programs.

In Victoria staff indicated they perceived there was not a lot of assistance available to prisoners, particularly male prisoners. The agency often got very short notice of a prisoner's release to their support and did not have the opportunity to work with clients before release. Some staff felt that unless prisoners had been lucky enough to be able to line up support, such as through prison chaplains or through family, they were largely left up to themselves to resolve problems like accommodation on release. Other staff noted that community-based housing information referral workers would visit prisons and that through a Pre- and Post-Release Network Committee workers in the field were able to discuss issues affecting the field and resolve some issues impacting on support services.

A program has recently commenced through a women's prison in Victoria to establish links for women approaching release into services such as the City Mission and the Office of Housing. While this program is limited in the number of places it can offer this initiative looks to establish a stronger basis for preparing people for dealing with accommodation and other issues before they are released.

### Conclusions — assistance for serving prisoners

Based on the understanding of workers in the field, there appears to be a good deal of variation between the levels and types of assistance available for prisoners approaching release in different jurisdictions. In some jurisdictions, clients are presenting to staff as having received very little assistance or preparation. There is a need for well-planned and integrated programs in each jurisdiction, which ideally link with related support services in the community.

It is interesting that agency staff in Victoria did not make reference to the Transitional Housing Management-Corrections Housing Pathways Initiative (THM-CHPI) which has been operating on a pilot basis in a number of Victorian prisons for approximately two years. Discussion by the agency in relation to female clients may have been referring to this Initiative without this being specifically noted by the researcher. It is possible that the agency has not dealt with clients who have come from the male prisons involved with the pilot or that for some other reason information about the Initiative had not flowed through to the agency. It is also possible that the questions posed by the interviewer did not tend to elicit this kind of specific information. Whatever the reason, this finding does not suggest in any way that the THM-CHPI is not achieving its objectives, rather that there may be a need for information about the Initiative to be more effectively disseminated to agencies at the operational level.

It appears likely that in many cases more assistance, formal or informal, is available than prisoners actually access. This may be because they are not aware of the assistance being available, in which case the corrections system might have to look at improved information flows or more proactive assistance. In other cases lack of access may be due to a lack of will on the part of prisoners themselves. This is a more difficult problem to address, but more proactive assistance and greater promotion of opportunities will go some way to dealing with it.

As noted above, assistance for remand or short-term prisoners is considered to be particularly lacking, although addressing this situation is not easy. As well as issues of willingness to participate and possible interference with court decisions as indicated above, the nature of remand custody and the necessary assumption that a client will not be convicted and imprisoned will always make interventions for these categories of prisoner problematic.

### **Perceived gaps in SAAP service provision**

Staff in each agency were asked whether they saw major gaps in SAAP service provision for ex-prisoners facing homelessness and, if so, what these gaps were. Staff were also asked what they found themselves having to do to get around these gaps. To an extent responses against these questions intersected with earlier responses about challenges in providing services to ex-prisoners, but there were also areas of expansion. Responses tended to follow to an extent the nature of the service provided by the responding agency.

Generally, there was perceived to be gaps in the number and variety of accommodation options available, as discussed earlier. Generally, a lack of affordable housing, particularly available public housing and housing in a variety of geographic areas, was identified as a major gap or problem by almost all staff in all agencies. In New South Wales, there was seen to be a big gap in services for women. There are some hostels or shelters available but they tend to be restrictive in their criteria and are considered to be quite institutional. Other female services are generalist services that are able to assist female ex-prisoners but do not necessarily deal with their particular problems, such as those stemming from institutionalisation.

There was a similar problem in South Australia, where accommodation options for women, especially those with children or escaping domestic violence, were limited. Staff in that agency pointed to the need for more emergency accommodation for women and families and medium-term supported accommodation for women. Staff also saw a need for accommodation options allowing women to be released on bail or undertake Home Detention without necessarily relying on family support. More support groups for women and children was seen as another gap in service.

Staff in some agencies saw gaps in mental health service provision which had direct relationships to issues surrounding ex-prisoner homelessness. There was seen to be gaps in the area of supported mental health accommodation which placed strains on ex-prisoner agencies who had to provide support to ex-prisoners with mental health issues without being properly resourced to do so.

As noted earlier, staff in a number of agencies saw a need for more transitional or half-way housing, specifically planned and allocated for prisoners on release. Some also saw the need for more community or group housing in which properly matched people could support and help each other with help and mentoring from support agencies.

Inadequate financial assistance was seen as a gap by a number of staff. They saw the amount of financial assistance provided by Centrelink at the time of release was not enough for people to get by, especially those clients not moving into supported accommodation. Some staff felt that there would be better outcomes for clients if they had a greater amount of money available up-front to pay for rental bonds and household goods. Staff also noted the difficulties many clients have with managing finances and felt this additional assistance would be better provided in the form of vouchers or other non-negotiable forms. A number of staff also felt there was a need for a greater amount of individualised assistance with budgeting and financial management skills.

Most staff members felt that, overall, there were services available for those who were aware of them and chose to use them. It is not surprising that staff providing intensive support services did not identify gaps in direct service provision, as their own agencies were providing these services. The ability of their agencies to provide services sufficient to meet demand within existing resources was however identified as a problem. Staff in agencies not offering intensive support services generally felt that there were no gaps in service for those clients who chose to 'play the game' and make use of services. Some saw a need for greater access to information about available services, but a number of staff felt that clients who wanted help would be able to find it.

Not surprisingly, staff members were not necessarily eager to discuss the specific tactics they used to get around gaps in service provision. Most staff talked about the need to be creative in their service provision and find ways to make the best use of the resources they had available. In some cases this meant finding flexible ways of working with protocols and policies, or even taking risks to achieve a good outcome for clients. In other cases creativity included developing other services out of existing resources where possible. Most saw good networking and close relationships with other agencies, together with the careful application of advocacy on behalf of clients, as an integral component to working around the gaps.

### Conclusions — gaps in SAAP service provision

The gaps in service provision identified by agencies corresponded closely to some of the challenges they saw in providing services to ex-prisoner clients.

The major area perceived to be deficient was a need for more accommodation options, particularly for the specialised needs of women escaping domestic violence and maybe having children in their care, or people with mental health issues. This is perhaps not so much a gap in SAAP service provision as a gap in resources SAAP services are able to access.

It will be noted later in this report that a lack of accommodation options, together with issues of financial assistance identified by staff, were also identified by ex-

prisoner clients when they were asked what help they thought was missing. At the same time clients, in common with agency staff, also felt that most services areas were adequately catered for, even though sufficient resources to deliver those services to all those requiring them were not necessarily in place.

## Results of interviews with ex-prisoner clients

### **Characteristics of the sample population**

It is important to acknowledge that the sample of ex-prisoner clients interviewed for this research is not representative of the whole ex-prisoner population. It was not envisaged that the methodology would produce a random sample. The sample of persons interviewed is selective on a number of dimensions. The sample was significantly narrowed to only those people who are clients of the six service provider agencies who were directly involved in the research. Therefore the sample necessarily excludes all those ex-prisoners who are exclusively clients of other service providers. Most significantly, and the importance of this qualification will be borne out in various ways in the research findings, the sample necessarily excludes all those ex-prisoners who do not utilise accommodation-related service providers.

Within this reduced population, the sample was further reduced to those clients who were willing to take part in the research and were, other than the two clients interviewed by telephone, available for interview at the time the interviewer was in the jurisdiction. In some cases clients who had originally indicated to agency staff they were willing to participate subsequently changed their minds. In one case, a number of appointments were made with a client whose rapidly changing personal circumstances during the time of the interviewer's visit led to him moving into a crisis situation and therefore becoming unavailable for interview.

As noted earlier, the involvement of agency staff in identifying potential interview subjects and facilitating contact with the interviewers was of invaluable assistance to the project. At the same time this also served to narrow the sample group to those who were, in most instances, specifically identified by staff as potentially willing and reasonably able to be interviewed. It was also apparent that in many cases staff members were identifying those clients the staff felt would be able to provide interesting input to the research and staff were consciously referring a selected cross-section of clients. This approach certainly contributed to the depth of information gained, though perhaps at the expense of a somewhat more random distribution of clients.

### **Demographics of the client population**

#### **Age and gender**

Forty-one clients were interviewed in this research. Clients ranged in age from 19 years to 65 years. The average age of the clients was just over 35 years, with a median age of 35. This is not inconsistent with the average age of the overall prison population, which in 2002 was 33.4 years (ABS Prisoners in Australia 2003).

Thirty-two of the clients interviewed (approximately 78%) were male and nine clients were female (approximately 22%). The proportion of females in this study was much higher than are imprisoned nationally. The prison census taken on 30 June 2003 showed that 93.4 per cent of serving prisoners were male and 6.6 per cent were female (ABS Prisoners in Australia 2003).

### **Income**

All clients interviewed reported their main source of income as social security payments. A small number of clients had recently commenced working on a casual or part-time basis, but their income from employment was still secondary to their income from social security payments at the time of interview.

### **Education**

Most clients interviewed (n=34; approximately 83%) had received some high school education outside the prison system but had not completed high school. Most indicated they had left high school after Year 8 or Year 9. Two clients had received only primary school education, while one had completed high school without undertaking any further study. Three clients had attained some kind of trade or technical qualification while one had undertaken higher tertiary study.

The majority of clients (n=33 or approximately 80%) had not undertaken any study or received any other qualifications within the prison system. While most indicated in response to a later question that they had undertaken various programs in prison, including behavioural management programs, literacy, numeracy and some vocational programs only eight indicated they had completed any formal study. Of these, six clients said they had gained a trade or technical qualification though it was not always clear whether this was actually to the level of a formal qualification. One client who had not previously completed high school study said he did so in prison, while the client who had gained a higher tertiary qualification undertook some of this study in prison.

### **Health**

During the interview clients were asked how they would rate their current state of physical health on a five point Likert scale that ranged from 'very poor' through to 'very good'. Clients were then asked how they would compare their physical health at the time of interview to their state of health at the time they were leaving prison (on the last occasion, in the case of those imprisoned more than once) using another five point Likert scale ranging from 'much worse' through 'same' to 'much better'. Where clients stated their health was 'much worse', 'worse', 'better' or 'much better' they were asked why they thought this was the case and what they thought had changed.

Very few clients indicated concerns with their current state of health with only two (approximately 5%) saying they were currently in very poor health and two others saying their health was poor. Twelve clients (approximately 29%) said their health was fair. Eighteen clients (approximately 44%) felt in good health, with seven (approximately 17%) reporting themselves in very good health. Overall, the average score on the Likert scale was 3.6, falling mid-way between fair and good, while the median score was 4, indicating a good state of health.



The greatest number of clients reported their health was the same at the time of interview as it was when they last left prison with 15 clients (approximately 37%) giving this response. Three clients (approximately 7%) felt their health was much worse since they left prison while 14 (approximately 34%) felt it was worse. Seven clients (approximately 17%) felt their health was better at the time of interview than when they left prison while two (approximately) five per cent saying it was much better. The average response on the Likert scale was 2.78, indicating health that was slightly worse while the median and modal response was 3, indicating it was the same.

Clients reporting that their health was much worse or worse since leaving prison cited a range of reasons for this. Five clients attributed their decreased health status to not eating as regularly or other aspects of an unstable lifestyle such as paying less to attention to health and hygiene. Four clients said they had recommenced drug use since they left prison. Three said they were fitter in prison because of time they had spent in the gym and using weight equipment. Others cited having children since leaving prison, stress arising from the insecurity of not having prison 'networks' and a condition arising from past employment as reasons for their declining health. One client gave a contradictory response indicating that his health had declined because prison impacted negatively on peoples' health.

Several of the clients whose health had improved cited related but opposite reasons to those whose health had declined. Two clients said they had begun getting their drug use under control since leaving prison, another said he was getting more exercise as he now walked everywhere he had to go. One client was now in better shape because he had been overweight in prison and was now eating less, while another felt that, due to his support agency, he was now free of the stress of being locked up and worrying about his safety. Another said he had felt depressed and lazy while in prison. Another client had been ill at the time he was admitted to prison and had been getting better since his release, while another had stabilised the medication for his mental health problems since leaving prison. The final client said that he was now more aware of the community and so was keeping out of trouble.

Interpreting responses to the perceived health status questions is problematic for a range of reasons. As noted, the most common response was for clients to suggest their health had not changed at all. Where it had, some responses were contradictory with two clients indicating their health was now very good, but nonetheless worse than when they left prison. A number of clients cited psychological or mental health reasons for their change in health status, despite the question being about physical health and this being emphasised by the interviewers. Finally any interpretations may be confounded by age variations between the clients and the fact that some clients had been out of prison for many years at the time of interview. Both of these factors could have led to normal changes in health status over time or inaccurate recollections influencing the clients' answers.

Nonetheless, it is interesting to note that of the clients reporting declines in their health, a slight majority (n=9 or approximately 53%) were from agencies not providing intensive and individually case-managed support and less likely than others in the study to be in stable accommodation. This is despite only 41 per cent

of clients overall having come from this group. Of the nine clients attributing their declining health to drug use, irregular meals or other aspects of an unstable life, all came from this relatively unstable group. Five of the nine had nowhere to live at the time of interview while two others were living in boarding houses. While there are problems attributing significance to this finding for the reasons suggested, it strongly suggests a possible avenue for further study.

## **Prison and release from prison**

This section will look at the client's histories of imprisonment. Clients were asked whether they had been in prison more than once. Those who had been in prison only once were asked when they were released from prison. Those who said they had been in prison more than once were asked when they were last released from prison. This way of modifying the question was used throughout the interview, such as with later questions that asked about the client's accommodation experiences since they were (last) released from prison.

Clients were asked how long they served the last time they were in prison. Clients were then asked if they had been released on supervision and, if so, whether they were still on supervision. Clients who indicated they had been to prison more than once were then asked about the number of times they had been in prison or juvenile detention and the periods they had served on each occasion. Finally, all clients were asked how old they were when they first went to prison or juvenile detention.

### **Number of occasions held in prison**

There was a good deal of variation in the number of occasions clients reported having been in prison or juvenile detention. The average number of occasions was just over 7 and the median number of occasions was 4.5. It is difficult to identify a typical pattern of occasions for this group however due to the large amount of variation. Fourteen per cent of clients (n=6) reported having been in prison once, and a further 27 per cent (n=11) reported having been held on two or three occasions. On the other hand, 24 per cent (n=10) had been in custody on 10 or more occasions with 14 per cent of the group (n=6) having been in prison or detention 20 or more times. For most with a very high number of occasions, a large proportion of these occasions were apparently very short periods of juvenile detention. It should be noted too that a number of clients could not recall precisely the number of occasions they had been in custody and in a small number of cases the researcher could not clearly determine whether the occasions reported included juvenile detention. One client stated that he simply could not remember how many times he had been in prison.

### **Age when first imprisoned**

There was also significant variation in the age at which clients first served a period of imprisonment or detention. While a number of clients reported having been institutionalised as orphans or wards of the state from a very young age, the youngest reported age at first detention was nine years old. This client reported to have been detained or imprisoned on 29 occasions, with a maximum period of five years. The oldest reported age when first imprisoned was a client who had been imprisoned twice since a first reception at age 42. The average age of first imprisonment or detention was just over 21 years, with a median age of 19.

### **Length of time served**

Clients were asked how long they had served during their most recent period of imprisonment. There was considerable variation within the group. Periods served varied from one day to 19 years with an average period of approximately one year seven months. The median period was six months.

### **Previous periods of imprisonment**

Clients were asked to give approximate dates, or approximate periods of time, for each of the terms of detention or imprisonment they had served. Those reporting more than a small number were asked to indicate the shortest and longest periods served. There was very wide variation in these periods. One client reported, once the interview was underway, that she had not in fact been imprisoned at all, but had been held overnight in the police watch-house on six or seven occasions. All other clients reported they had been held in prison, with the shortest periods ranging from two days to 19 years. The average of the shortest periods served by this group was approximately 10 months, though this is somewhat skewed through inclusion of the 19 year sentence. With this one sentence removed the average shortest periods falls to slightly over four months. Removal of the next highest period, two years nine months, reduces the average to approximately 3<sup>1</sup>/<sub>2</sub> months. The median shortest period served was 2<sup>1</sup>/<sub>2</sub> months. The average of sentences below the median was approximately 24 days, and the average above the median, with the 19 year sentence excluded, was approximately 232 days, indicating the degree of variation within this group.

The longest periods of custody ranged from one day to the same period of 19 years. The average period was just under two years two months. With the 19 year sentence excluded this fell to approximately one year eight months. The median longest period served was one year. The average below the median was five months, and the average of sentences above the median, including all sentences, was two years 11 months.

### **Release on supervision**

Twenty five clients (approximately 61%) said they had been released from prison under some form of supervision, typically parole but also home detention or bail. Seventeen of those clients said they were still under supervision at the time they were interviewed.

Of the 25 clients who had been released on bail, two were living in boarding houses at the time of interview. It had been a considerable amount of time since both these clients had been released — approximately three years for one and eight years for the other — so it is not reasonable to draw any inferences between their supervision status and current accommodation. The same can be said for seven others who had been released on parole between six months and 18 months before the interview, although one of these clients was still under supervision.

The remaining 16 clients had all been released on parole within the preceding six months, 15 of these within the preceding three months. All of these clients were still on parole at the time of interview. Of these 16 clients, one was living with a

relative in an apparently ongoing situation while one was staying at a shelter as a bail condition. Two of the remaining clients were in privately rented homes and one was in public housing. Eleven of the clients, approximately 69 per cent of those released on parole, were in supported accommodation when interviewed. In total 15 of the 16 clients (approximately 94%) released on parole within the preceding six months were in apparently stable, ongoing housing.

Sixteen clients had not been released on parole or other supervision. Only one of these clients was in supported accommodation and his pathway to that service had been through hospital three months previously, rather than following his prison release. Two of these clients were living in boarding houses and had been out of prison for several years. Six clients not released on supervision had nowhere to live. Three of these clients had been released within the preceding three months — one within the previous week — the others between two and seven years previously. Two of the remaining clients were living in a shelter, with two others each in public housing and sharing with friends. Therefore, of the 16 clients released without supervision, half were not in stable or ongoing housing, with either nowhere to live or living in an emergency accommodation shelter. The number in unstable housing could have been higher, but no assessment can be made of the stability of those in shared accommodation.

### Conclusions — prison and release from prison

In drawing any conclusions from examining these periods, a few necessary precautions must be taken. As noted earlier, it is not claimed that the sample population for this study was either randomly selected or representative of the overall ex-prisoner population. The information is solely derived from clients' recollections and the extent and apparent accuracy of these recollections varied considerably between individuals. With limited exceptions, the periods of time recorded are approximate and are only intended as a guide.

With these precautions in mind, it can be seen that while there is marked variation, overall this group exhibits a fairly high degree of criminality, based on the length of their most recent periods of imprisonment and their longest periods of imprisonment. A quarter of the group reported having been in prison on 10 or more occasions. This is perhaps not remarkable given that the group, as discussed below, are all accessing accommodation services and most are either in supported accommodation or accommodation facilitated by the accommodation service. With the likely exception of those with no accommodation or those in very short term temporary accommodation, these clients have generally reached a stage in their lives and imprisonment history where they are seeking to make major changes in their lives and are able to secure the support of service providers to do this. These circumstances are most likely to arise when a person has experienced imprisonment at least a few times and perhaps where the length of the sentences they are receiving is increasing.

Within the limited sample group of this study, there is a strong relationship between being released from prison on parole or other supervision and being able to access stable and ongoing accommodation. This relationship was borne out as well in

questions which examined the use of services by clients, with a number of clients feeling that community corrections or parole officers were an important source of support and assistance. This view was echoed by staff of several agencies, with the related view that the prospects for those released into the community without supervision or support in place were quite dim compared to those that had such mechanisms.

The strength of this finding can be weakened to an extent by the fact that some of the clients in supported accommodation were in that accommodation as a bail or release condition, and therefore support was mandated in their cases. The nature of the agencies participating also tended to influence this result. At the same time, and perhaps with greater effect, the finding is strengthened by the knowledge that the sample group for this survey did not include people who had been released from prison without support and had either returned to prison or were still out of prison but not receiving support. If the sample could be extended to include all released prisoners, it is anticipated that a far greater proportion released without support would be in unstable accommodation or have returned to prison. This may be a speculation worth pursuing in other research.

## **Finding accommodation**

This section will examine some of the issues for ex-prisoners trying to find and keep accommodation. Clients were asked questions about the type of accommodation they were living in at the time of interview, their expectations about where they would be living at the time they were released and their experiences finding accommodation since being released. They were also asked about the accommodation they had before their last admission into prison and problems they had finding and keeping accommodation in the past. Clients were also asked, based on their knowledge and experiences, what advice they could give to someone who was just about to be released from prison and was worried about where he or she was going to live. Finally, clients were asked, based on their knowledge and experiences, whether they felt there were some kinds of accommodation that were suitable for people leaving prison and whether there are other types of accommodation ex-prisoners should avoid.

### **Where clients are living now**

The accommodation situation clients were in at the time of interview was to a very large extent a product of the types of agencies who volunteered to participate in the study. As one of the agencies was a homeless men's shelter, the clients interviewed there were necessarily homeless and either sleeping rough on the streets or in squats, or staying in the temporary situation offered by the shelter. One other agency did not provide direct accommodation services but provided general assistance and informal referrals as an adjunct to its mandated role as a lunch and drop-in centre. The clients interviewed at this agency therefore constituted a slightly broader cross-section of accommodation situations.

As the majority of participating agencies provided some form of supported accommodation, most clients were either in this supported accommodation at the time of interview, or were living independently in housing the agency had helped them secure.

The way in which the nature of the participating agencies skewed these results is indicated by the finding that some 35 per cent of clients interviewed (n=15) were identified as being in supported accommodation at the time of interview. A further eight clients (approximately 20%) were living in privately rented or public housing. Four clients (approximately 10%) were living with parents or relatives, or sharing with others, in situations that seemed relatively stable. Therefore, overall some 65 per cent of clients in this group were, at the time of interview, living in situations that offered an apparently reasonable degree of stability.

At the same time, approximately 14 per cent of clients (n=6) reported having nowhere to live at the time of interview. Five of these clients were squatting in vacant houses or other buildings, while one reported that he lives with his sister on and off but mainly lives on the streets. At the time of interview this client stated that he was living outside the homeless shelter so he could look after his aunts and uncles who also lived outside the shelter.

Four clients (approximately 10%) identified as staying in a shelter or other temporary accommodation while a further four were living in boarding or guesthouses. As discussed in more detail later a considerable number of the clients interviewed felt that shelters, refuges and boarding or guesthouses were environments that ex-prisoners should avoid if possible. Many clients felt that these environments exposed ex-prisoners and other residents to tensions, drug use and alcohol use which would be likely to lead to them re-offending or at least significantly increase the risk of returning to drug use or a lifestyle that included offending. Together with those clients who were in clearly vulnerable situations as a result of having nowhere to live, it can be seen that despite the skew towards interview subjects being in supported or other stable accommodation, some 35 per cent of clients interviewed for this research were living in situations that possibly exposed them to a markedly increased risk of further offending.

### **Pathways to current accommodation**

Clients were asked whether they had tried to find accommodation themselves before coming to the support agency for help. This question was somewhat irrelevant in the case of clients coming to the lunch and drop-in centre as they were not receiving any direct accommodation services from that centre though one client was receiving accommodation support from a service in the same town. That client had gone straight from prison into accommodation arranged by that service. All other clients of that centre reported they had made their own efforts to find accommodation and were living in shared housing or in a boarding house.

Most clients who had nowhere to live stated they had made efforts to find accommodation but had been unable to. One client, who indicated he had been homeless and living on the streets for much of his life, had decided to return to living on the streets without trying to secure more stable accommodation. This client stated he was able to live with his sister from time to time when he needed a break from living rough but was otherwise relatively comfortable with the prospect of living on the streets. This client also indicated that he believed through his offending history, being Indigenous and having a limited income he would have no chance of finding accommodation in any case.

Amongst other clients, the question of whether they had tried to find other accommodation was strongly linked to the stage at which they had become a client of the agency. Ten clients had come from prison directly into supported accommodation. In most of these cases residing at that particular accommodation was a condition of parole, bail or home detention bail. In some other cases clients had been able to arrange accommodation at that site and had that address nominated in their parole order. One client noted that he had ensured the agency's supported accommodation was included in his parole order as a way of 'forcing his hand' and giving him a strong support base to address his offending behaviour.

In a number of other cases clients had found accommodation with relatives or friends following their release from prison, but this became unavailable for various reasons. This led to them being in a degree of crisis at the time they presented to the agency for assistance.

### **Accommodation expectations when leaving prison**

Clients were asked what expectations they had, shortly before or at the time of, their last release from prison regarding their accommodation. Clients were asked if they had an expectation of where they were going to live and if they had accommodation arranged. Whether a client had been able to make firm arrangements for accommodation, particularly supported accommodation, made important differences to his or her perceived prospects of success, expectations and attitude.

Of the 15 clients in supported accommodation at the time of interview, 12 had been able to arrange this prior to their release and therefore knew that they had this accommodation to go to. One other client had supported accommodation arranged for him but stated that he was not aware of this until a support worker met him at the prison gate. Three more clients in privately rented or public housing at the time of interview had moved from prison into supported accommodation and had since moved to their present accommodation through assistance from their supporting agencies. One other client had gone from prison into privately rented housing organised by his supporting agency. As will be discussed later in this report, there appears to be a strong relationship between provision of accommodation-related support and successful progress towards re-integration among this client group.

For many of these clients, having support and accommodation arranged meant the difference between being held in custody and released on either parole or bail. A number of clients were on bail, with or without home detention conditions, at the time of interview. In most cases these clients had been bailed to the hostel or flat provided by the accommodation service and residing in that location was a condition of their release. The significance of having appropriate accommodation when facing charges was borne out by one client who stated that each of his four periods of detention had been while he was held on remand, having no fixed abode to go to. Other clients also reported past instances of having been held due to a lack of accommodation, with two clients indicating they had continued to serve a term of imprisonment while being eligible for parole (in one case for 10 years) as they could not arrange stable accommodation or support they could go to on release.

Of the 18 clients (approximately 44% of the group) who reported they had a clear expectation of where they would be living after release, only one did not have apparently stable, ongoing accommodation at the time of interview. This was a client living in a homeless men's shelter who stated he had arranged temporary accommodation at the shelter while on remand and residing there was a condition of his release on bail. This client presented as being positive in his outlook for the future, and said he was using his time at the hostel to accrue some money so he could move on to a rented property.

A far smaller proportion of those who left prison without clear accommodation arrangements was in stable, ongoing accommodation at the time of interview. Of the 23 clients (approximately 56% of the group) in this category, six (approximately 23% of the sub-group) identified as having nowhere to live. In fact, all of the clients in this study who had nowhere to live left prison without any accommodation arranged or any clear expectation of where they would be living. A further six clients who had left prison in this situation were living at the time of interview in either a shelter or boarding house. While a boarding house can provide a form of stable and ongoing accommodation, as discussed later in this report it is not necessarily a desirable environment for ex-prisoners to be going into and represents a less satisfactory accommodation outcome than medium or long-term supported or independent accommodation.

On this basis, nearly 50 per cent of clients in this group who had left prison without appropriate or desirable accommodation arranged were without this form of accommodation at the time of interview.

In some cases, clients reported having an expectation of where they would be living, but not one that would be considered desirable. Two clients, who had since been able to move on to ongoing accommodation, stated they expected to be living 'on the streets' or 'in a tent by the river'. Another said he knew that when his first half-payment from Centrelink ran out he would have to find somewhere to squat and had in fact been squatting since he got out of prison two months before the interview. One client, who found out a month before his release that he would be able to go into a rental home assisted by his accommodation agency, said before this knowledge he fully expected to be living on the streets when he was released. Other clients simply said they were only concerned with getting out the gate, and did not worry about accommodation until later.

One client, living in a homeless shelter, said that he did not want to have any expectations or plans for when he left prison, as trying to set goals meant setting himself up for failure which would then undermine his self-esteem. He felt that while people like to have plans when they come out of prison, there is not enough support available in the community to allow these plans to be carried out. Another client said he would come up with dreams for his future, but social security income 'doesn't let you reach your dreams'.

Another client had unexpectedly found support from his family, which he was finding invaluable in helping him get his life back together and keep him out of prison. The only problem, this client reported, was that he had not made any plans because he



never expected to be out of prison for as long as his family's support had allowed him to be.

### **Experiences since leaving prison**

For those clients able to move from prison directly into supported accommodation, the transition back into the community was clearly smoother than for those without this form of accommodation. Clients in supported accommodation appeared far better placed to start dealing with issues of daily living such as arranging social security payments, organising finances and developing domestic and life skills than were clients without stable accommodation and support. Overall, these clients demonstrated more positive attitudes about their prospects of staying away from drug use and offending and seemed committed to returning to the community.

One client, who had since moved into supported accommodation, stated that he was being held on domestic violence-related charges and had been bailed to the marital home where the domestic violence had been perpetrated and his wife was still living. Another client was released on bail to a supported accommodation house but chose to leave because of the amount of offending being carried out by other residents.

Another client had made arrangements a short time before his release to share a publicly rented flat with a friend but arrived at the house to find the house empty, his friends having been arrested in the meantime and the flat cleaned out. This client lived in the flat as a squatter until moved on by the police. He subsequently spent time in a crisis shelter then in a homeless shelter before receiving accommodation through his current service provider.

For most clients reporting they had nowhere to live, their lives since release from prison had been characterised by instability or, as some clients put it, by 'chaos'. One client reported that in the last 12 months he hadn't lived in any one place for more than two weeks. He would find an empty house, flat or commercial building to squat in and would stay there until detected and moved on by the police. This client's lifestyle seemed to follow a fairly consistent pattern. Across a fortnightly cycle he would receive a social security payment and take up cheap accommodation in a private motel in an area away from his 'old associates'. He indicated that he would feel committed during this part of the cycle to getting his life together by saving some money and working towards a stable home and employment. After two or three days he would become bored and go back to his old associates where he would spend his money on illicit drugs. Within two or three days his money would run out and he would return to the homeless shelter where he would live until his next fortnightly social security payment when he would recommence the same cycle.

While other homeless clients did not demonstrate this pattern with the same clarity, other clients reported similar instability in accommodation linked to illicit drug use cycles and spoke of other people they knew with similar lifestyles. A staff member in one agency stated that many people coming to that agency would follow similar patterns of intense illicit drug use immediately following a social security payment, followed by a period of 'hanging out' for more drugs during the rest of the period. These cycles also impacted on accommodation levels at the shelter, with staff

reporting that many clients would ‘disappear’ when they got their social security payments and return a few days later when this money had run out.

In other cases clients did not identify illicit drug use cycles or patterns but cited illicit drug use as a major factor in their current situation. One client, for instance, had been able to live with his brother in stable accommodation for three months after being released from prison. The client then recommenced using drugs, leading to his brother evicting him. Since that time the client’s life had been marked by periods of time in crisis shelters, homeless shelters, detoxification and rehabilitation programs, relapse and further imprisonment, accommodation in a boarding house until his money ran out and he got behind in his rent and finally the situation of homelessness and squatting he was in at the time of interview.

The relationship between drug use, offending and accommodation instability will be discussed in more detail later in this report.

For some clients, particularly homeless clients, drug use interacts with other forms of chaos in their lives. Another homeless client reported that she had previously had relatively stable accommodation, living for around six months at a time with her partner or sharing with friends. She reported that she had lost a publicly rented house she shared with her partner through disputes with the neighbours and a loss of her employment. She had then been evicted from a number of shared houses through unpaid rent resulting from her housemates ‘taking off’ or housemates not paying their share of the rent. The stress of these situations then led to increased drug use that resulted in her living on a short-term basis in a number of boarding houses. At the time of interview, her drug use meant that she could not afford to stay in boarding houses and, together with her partner, was squatting wherever she could find an empty building.

A number of clients, particularly but not exclusively those having nowhere to live, reported a lack of money as their main barrier to having more stable accommodation. This seemed to vary from one location to another and was more prevalent among those clients not receiving daily living support. Most of the homeless clients identified a lack of money as the major barrier to them being able to secure ongoing accommodation. While some clients blamed themselves for ‘blowing their money’ on illicit drugs or alcohol and acknowledged they had not planned their finances well, others felt that the amount they received in social security payments was insufficient for them to accrue enough for an accommodation bond, or was not enough to pay rent other than for a boarding house room. One homeless client said that he could not even afford a boarding house room and was living in a squat while coming to the homeless shelter for his meals.

It is noteworthy that homeless clients citing money as the principal barrier did not indicate an awareness of any assistance, in the form of bond loans or other support, that may have been available through Centrelink or their state public housing agency.

### **Where clients lived before prison**

During the interviews all clients were asked where they were living before they went to prison. It should be noted at the outset that the answers given in response to

this question, and conclusions drawn from them, can only be considered indicative. Clients did not always have a clear recollection of where they were living at that time and they did not always answer in a way that allowed one clear category to be identified. In some cases it had been a considerable period of time since the client had last been imprisoned and this hampered recollection in some of these cases. A considerable proportion of clients indicated their lives had been chaotic and accommodation unstable during the period before imprisonment, and the nature of their accommodation may have changed several times in that period.

In all cases where the client's recollection or answer was not clear, the category recorded was the one judged by the researcher to be the most indicative of their situation. In these cases the researcher sought endorsement from the clients as to the category recorded.

Twelve clients (just under 30% of the group) reported they had nowhere to live in the period immediately before their imprisonment. One other client said he had stable public housing, living in the same property for six years before his imprisonment, but relationship problems had left him living on the streets during the two or three months before his arrest. Three of these clients continued to have nowhere to live at the time of interview.

Three clients (approximately 7%) stating they were living in boarding houses before their imprisonment. Two of these clients were living in a shelter at the time of interview and the other had nowhere to live.

Two clients said they were living in a shelter, or another form of temporary accommodation, at the time of their imprisonment. Two others reported they were living in supported accommodation at that time. Each of these clients was living in either supported accommodation at the time of interview, or in rented housing facilitated by the accommodation agency. While further examination of this point would be necessary, there is an interesting possibility that these clients' exposure to accommodation-related services in the past may have assisted them in being aware of the types of support and assistance they have been able to access during or after their latest release from prison. Further to this point, two of the three clients who were in public housing before their imprisonment were in supported accommodation at the time of interview. The other was a client who, while living at a homeless shelter at the time of interview, was very positive about using his time at the shelter to save some money to pay off some old fines and move towards stable, rented housing.

Six clients (15% of the group) stated they were living in privately rented homes before their imprisonment. Four of these clients were in supported accommodation at the time of interview, with one each in a boarding house and a shelter. Four of these clients specifically indicated their accommodation was stable and ongoing before their imprisonment.

The issue of previously stable accommodation also arose in the case of the six clients who reported they were living with parents before imprisonment. Three of these clients indicated they were in a stable, family home that is apparently no longer available to them since their offending and imprisonment. Three of these six clients were in supported accommodation at the time of interview, with one each in a

boarding house, public housing and having nowhere to live. No client who lived with parents or relatives before their imprisonment was living with parents or relatives at the time of interview. Two of these clients indicated that their family had withdrawn their support as a result of the client's offending behaviour, while this appeared to be the case with one other client.

Two of the clients who previously lived with parents or relatives indicated that this was not necessarily a stable situation, with both indicating they moved around between living with their parents and with other relatives or friends. There was similar instability in the case of the seven clients (17% of the group) who reported that they previously shared a home with friends or others. Three of these clients noted that their accommodation before prison was very unstable. Two clients reported 'a lot of drifting around' between sharing with different people and, in one case, living on the streets. Another client stated that he had only ever been out of prison for a 'couple of weeks' at time and had an extremely unstable lifestyle, continually moving around between the streets, hostels, boarding houses and motels depending on the cash he had available at the time.

Overall, 14 clients (34% of the group) indicated they were in stable or reasonably stable accommodation situations before their last period of imprisonment. One of these clients had been in stable accommodation for 18 months before his imprisonment, and had gradually been getting more stable as he matured, but indicated his accommodation and lifestyle were very unstable before that. Another client reported having stable accommodation, but also indicated that he had a lot of problems paying his rent due to his drug use. One client said that he had held a stable home in a regional area for a long time before moving to the state's capital city for medical reasons. He had then found significant difficulties with maintaining stable accommodation in the city, largely due to family problems. Two clients indicated that while they had ongoing rental accommodation, this would not have been possible without help from their supporting agency.

Alongside this, 27 clients (66%) were in unstable accommodation in the period immediately before they were imprisoned. The accommodation situations of most of these clients were marked by the 'chaos' that a lot of them referred to — continually moving around between situations, such as living on the streets, or sharing with different people, staying in boarding houses or motels when they had some money available. Many of these clients attributed the instability to illicit drug use and the lifestyle that accompanied it, including having to move from places they were staying because of problems caused by their drug use, offending and financial instability. As one client put it 'the lifestyle that goes along with crime and heavy drug use doesn't always include stable housing'. A small number of these clients stated they would continually stay on the move to avoid police detection while dealing illicit drugs.

### **Loss of property and possessions while in prison**

A problem identified by a number of clients was the loss of their property and possessions while in prison. A number of clients had been in stable accommodation but lost access to this through not being able to pay rent while in prison. A number of clients also reported they had to leave possessions behind when taken into

custody and had later found everything they owned had been stolen while they were in prison. These kinds of losses can be devastating for a newly released prisoner, already faced with the challenges of starting to rebuild their lives from scratch when they return to the community.

Some supporting agencies provide a storage service where people going into prison can store their possessions, for a nominal fee. This is very beneficial to some offenders but relies on them being aware of the service and being to make the necessary arrangements before they are imprisoned or their possessions are stolen.

### **Relationships between offending and accommodation**

In a pair of questions, clients were asked whether they saw relationships between their offending and problems they may have had with accommodation. They were asked whether they felt difficulties with finding and keeping somewhere to live had played a part in their offending, and whether they felt their offending had made it difficult for them to find and keep somewhere to live. In a later question, clients were asked how they felt being in prison had affected their accommodation options.

As noted earlier, clients were not asked directly about their offending and it was made clear before any questions were asked that they were not expected to talk about their offending. Nonetheless many clients chose to make some references to the nature of their offending, and it is acknowledged that the nature of the questions seeking to pick up on the relationships between offending and accommodation perhaps tended to encourage these responses.

### **Whether accommodation problems contribute to offending**

More than 70 per cent of clients (n=29) felt there was a clear relationship between their offending and problems with finding and keeping accommodation. Close to half of these clients made specific reference to drug use as the major contributing factor in their offending and accommodation problems. Many other clients did not refer specifically to drug use, but did refer to chaotic lifestyles and instability arising from never having enough money for food or accommodation.

It became clear that while there is a strong relationship between illicit drug use, the lifestyle that tends to surround it, offending behaviours and stable accommodation, this relationship is a complex and multi-faceted one for these clients. For some clients, it was drug use, or other offending behaviours, that established a lifestyle which resulted in, or at least included, unstable accommodation. A number talked about their lives being out of control and never having enough money to buy food or secure any kind of ongoing accommodation. Some maintained that their offending and drug use were not the result of unstable accommodation, rather that the offending and drug use were the real problem and unstable accommodation was either the result of these behaviours or was secondary to them.

Some clients said that the main concern in their lives was buying illicit drugs or finding the money for drugs. Having accommodation was a secondary consideration and they were not concerned about where they were living or staying providing they were supporting their drug habit. A small number of clients stated that having

unstable accommodation was a conscious decision, as they would move constantly to avoid police detection. For others the instability was a consequence of not having money for accommodation, or a consequence of having to move away from relationships with family or friends that had been damaged by the client's drug use and offending. One client summed up this aspect of the relationship between drug use and accommodation by saying simply that you cannot have structure in an addicted lifestyle.

Many of those clients who related their offending with accommodation problems saw their offending as a survival tactic. Nine clients (close to one quarter of the total group) stated they had committed offences simply to get money for food or to be able to afford a room to rent. One of these clients talked about how he would drift around between living on the streets, staying at friends' houses or staying in good motels, depending on the cash he had available from one day to the next. Another client said that she didn't use illicit drugs when she was in a stable environment but would steal food and turn to drugs during times when she was homeless. This client commented that she did not offend when her basic human needs for shelter and food were being met.

It was apparent with most of these clients that illicit drug use was also a factor, as it was expenditure on illicit drugs that resulted in them not having enough money for food and accommodation.

In other cases though, clients saw their offending as directly resulting from the instability of their accommodation and their lives overall. A number of clients said their offending arose from frustration. This frustration came from a range of sources – from not being able to find proper accommodation or stay in the one place, from not being able to find a job or from family breakdown.

A number of clients bore out the importance of having stability, particularly stable accommodation, in minimising their offending. One client stated that all his offending came down to stress resulting from not having stable accommodation. When he had a roof over his head and did not have to worry about accommodation, he would be much more free of stress and could carry on a lifestyle without offending. This client reported that he had spent much of his adult life living in short term accommodation. When he first came into the accommodation, he felt much calmer and could start thinking about building a life without offending. As the time when he had to leave would come closer, he would become more and more anxious about where he was going to stay next and this would inevitably lead to offending.

This client's feelings were not unique, even within this small population. Several other clients felt they would have offended less if they had stable accommodation. As noted above, some clients said they had offended simply to get money to rent a motel or boarding house room. Others said that when they did not have anywhere stable to live they felt they had nothing left to lose. One client talked of giving up and thinking 'bugger it, I might as well re-offend or breach my parole'. Another saw his drug use as a 'band aid' to help him feel better about not having anything worthwhile in his life.

For several clients, it was the tension that came from not having a stable home that was a major factor in their offending and their drug use. One client attributed his offending to the tension and lack of stability that came from not having a home base where he could go to ‘chill out’ and relax and where he had something to look forward to at the end of the day. One 36 year old client said that, before receiving the independent living support she was receiving at the time of interview, she had never before had a place where she felt comfortable, and that stress and instability linked to accommodation had played a big part in her offending and self-harming behaviours. Another client talked about how instability would leave him constantly pre-occupied with what he had to do to achieve stability and how he could get money for food and to establish some security in his life. Another client spoke of never having a stable home and always being on edge, always looking for ‘an easy score’. A number of other clients talked of the stress of living rough and having to associate with others in the same situation as a major factor in their offending.

Another client talked of times in her life when she was in what she called ‘keeping mode’. These were times, for periods of months or even years, when she had a home and her life was marked by routine and stability. When in ‘keeping mode’ it would take something quite dramatic to force her out of this stability and move her from where she was staying. There had been times in her life though where such dramatic things had happened — she referred to problems with housemates and with neighbours — and she had lost her accommodation and stability. During those times she began to think differently and became more erratic, leading to drug use and offending. It would then take time before she could again move into a more stable lifestyle and begin rebuilding her life.

It is important to note that not all clients in this group saw that problems with finding or keeping accommodation had contributed to their offending behaviour. In all, 12 clients (approximately 29%) stated that their offending had nothing to do with accommodation. In a number of cases these were clients who had been in stable accommodation, mostly living with family or in privately or publicly rented homes. In a number of cases these clients had been imprisoned on only one or two occasions and it appeared the offences were not related to drug use or linked to any kind of unstable or chaotic lifestyle. In these cases it appeared, as much as could be discerned from the information volunteered by the client, that the motivations underlying these offences had not been linked to obtaining money for survival or food, or as a response to tensions or frustrations arising from the clients’ lifestyles. In one case the client responded that his offence had been a one-off thing, definitely not related to accommodation. In another case the client said he had offended simply because he wanted to.

### **Offending as a barrier to finding accommodation**

A small majority of clients (n=21 or 51%) stated that they felt their offending, or the fact they had a criminal record and had been in prison, was a barrier when trying to find accommodation. Most of these clients noted that it was very hard, or even impossible, for them to secure private rental accommodation through a real estate agent. The most common problems encountered were an inability to provide rental references and having to explain the gap in their accommodation history during the

period they were in prison. Some clients said they were honest about having been in prison and most had found this resulted in a refusal of their tenancy application.

Several clients talked about having been directly discriminated against by real estate agents or landlords due to their criminal record or ex-prisoner status. One talked about boarding house rooms, which he knew for certain were empty, suddenly becoming unavailable when the landlord learned the client had been in prison. Another client said he had been refused properties on the assumption that his 'druggie mates' would always be hanging around, even though this client stated that his offences were not drug-related and he had never used illicit drugs or associated with illicit drug users. A small number of clients said they would not disclose their criminal record, but two of these clients said they had been evicted from accommodation when their history became known.

Several clients said that, even aside from the problems of successfully applying for tenancy, they had no prospect of being able to afford to rent privately, particularly with rising rental costs and the need to come up with a substantial amount of money for bond.

A number of clients felt the private rental market was entirely cut off from them and saw no prospect of entering that market.

It is important to note that, for many clients, the barriers to being able to secure private accommodation were also stopping them being able to find work. Many clients noted that their criminal history and ex-prisoner status was a major barrier to their employability and a number said that employers 'didn't want to know you' when they found out about the clients' history.

The relationship between work and accommodation is a significant one as being employed clearly benefits a person's chances of securing stable accommodation, from a straight financial point of view, as well as through the ability to provide references. Being employed is likely to suggest stability and reliability to a prospective landlord. Many of the clients interviewed were working towards finding employment as a fundamental component of their goal of securing stable accommodation and their broader goal of successfully re-entering the community. For these clients, whether or not they had found employment was the key factor in their expectations for the future.

At the same time, a lack of stable accommodation can affect a person's ability to secure employment. Two clients referred to the need to have a 'home base' and telephone you can operate from while looking for employment, or where a prospective employer can make contact with you. Another client said it was impossible to find work when your address and telephone number was a shelter. This was also echoed on a number of occasions during staff interviews, where staff members said prospective landlords or employers had abandoned contact when they learned the client was staying in a shelter or hostel.

For many clients it was apparent that having employment and stable accommodation was critical to their self-esteem and prospects of establishing a lifestyle free from offending.



Some clients did not see their offending or their time in prison as a barrier to finding accommodation. Sometimes this was expressed in a positive sense. A small number of clients said they had always been able to find accommodation when they needed it, though having sufficient money was still a problem. One client, who had an extensive history of childhood institutionalisation and juvenile detention, saw his imprisonment as a benefit to his accommodation prospects. Through imprisonment he was able to access the intensive support service that had helped him secure a rental property and was helping him get his life back together in many ways. Another client, perhaps coincidentally of the same service, felt he had learned far more about finding and keeping employment and accommodation while in prison than he ever had in the community. As discussed in more detail later in the report, this view of imprisonment as a positive aid to accommodation was not one expressed by other clients.

### **Expectations of future accommodation**

Clients were asked what expectations they had about where they would be living in the future, specifically in three months' time and in 12 months' time.

Clients' expectations about their future accommodation were closely related to the type of accommodation they had at the time of interview. Three months into the future, most clients living in privately rented homes, public housing or in supported accommodation were expecting and hoping to be living in the same place. Some in supported accommodation were expecting to have moved to another stage of their particular agency's program, such as moving from a short-term hostel to medium-term independent living. Others were hoping to have qualified for public housing during that time, or have been able to find work and have enough money to be renting privately.

These clients were also generally optimistic about where they would be living in 12 months time. Seventeen of the 23 clients in private rental or public housing, or in supported accommodation, said they expected to be in ongoing housing. The majority of these expected to be in permanent public housing, with a smaller number in private rental and one expecting to be in the same supported accommodation. It is worth noting that several of these clients talked about their medium-term future in very positive terms, expecting to be in work or study, hoping to resolve problems with former partners and children or simply 'settled and going in the right direction'. Less positively, one client said she expected to either be in public housing or back in jail, while six felt that 12 months was simply too far away for them to have any expectations.

Interestingly, the four clients living in boarding houses at the time of interview all expected to be living in the same boarding house in three months' time. One of them expected to still be there in 12 months, while two expected to be renting their own homes within that time. One of the four clients in boarding houses did not have any expectations for 12 months ahead.

Those clients living with parents, relatives or friends and those with nowhere to live seemed less certain about their expectations and hopes. One living with a relative hoped to be with that relative at both future points, while another living with a

relative hoped to be living with her daughter in either supported accommodation or public housing at both points. One client living with friends was happy there and had not thought about three months into his future, while 12 months was too far away to consider. Another in this situation was thinking about renting a home, but was unsure whether to return to his past area, where the offending occurred and a lot of other negative influences were concentrated, or look to move somewhere else. For this client, 12 months was too far ahead as well.

Clients living in shelters seemed relatively positive, with two of the four expecting to be renting their own home at both points in the future. The other expected to be living with her mother or in an outreach shelter in three months, while expecting to be waiting for public housing in 12 months' time. The other was concentrating on dealing with being on probation and could not look into the future.

Clients who had nowhere to live at the time of interview generally did not have expectations, or even strong hopes, about their futures. At the three month point, one wanted to be in a boarding house, but was finding it hard to break out of a cycle of drug use and resulting illness that prevented him moving ahead. Another was hoping to get into a boarding house if he could find work and get into detoxification and drug rehabilitation. Two were saving money for bond and rent to get their own flats, one through busking, while another talked in loose terms about buying a caravan somewhere. The other homeless client had no plans to be living anywhere other than on the streets, in either three months or 12 months.

Of the six clients with nowhere to live, three thought that 12 months into the future was too hard to think about. One who talked about saving money for a flat at the three month point expected to be sharing with friends in 12 months. The client saving money through busking hoped to have a car within 12 months and so have a greater choice of where to live. The client saving for a caravan said that 12 months was too far away. He never made plans that far ahead because if he did he would fail and be really hard on himself. The most positive response was the client hoping to find work and get into detox, who hoped to have a job, be drug free and reunited with his parents and family within 12 months.

While conclusions can only be drawn from this limited sample with some degree of caution, it is apparent that those clients living in stable accommodation are able to be much more positive about their futures than those not in positions of stability. Those receiving close support in particular seemed able to be quite definite about their expectations and portrayed these expectations in realistic terms. For those in less stable positions without support, their futures seemed based more on hope than expectation.

### **Positive and negative types of accommodation**

Clients were also asked, based on their knowledge and experiences, whether they felt there were some kinds of accommodation that were suitable for people leaving prison and whether there are other types of accommodation ex-prisoners should avoid.

A common theme emerging from these responses was that most clients saw guest or boarding houses as very negative environments, together with emergency

accommodation shelters. Many clients talked about the drug and alcohol abuse prevalent amongst residents in boarding houses, as well as in emergency accommodation shelters. They felt that these environments placed ex-prisoners in situations where there were many temptations and pressures to re-offend and where the influences of other residents would be highly detrimental to a person trying to make positive lifestyle changes.

Many clients also saw problems arising from the close living conditions of people in boarding houses or shelters. They said there was a great deal of conflict in those environments, as people were continually 'in each others' faces'. This created tensions that could lead to violent conflict or other forms of offending and could have serious impacts on a person's self-esteem and motivation.

A number of clients referred to boarding houses as being no better than prisons. A couple talked about boarding house rooms being just another cell, no better than the cell they had in prison. Some felt that these rooms did not give people the space they needed to get away from one another, again creating tensions and conflicts. A number of clients talked about how you could not aspire to own anything while you lived in a boarding house as it was sure to be stolen. The lack of material possessions, together with the decrepit and dirty living conditions many had found in boarding houses, was damaging to the self-esteem of many clients. In many cases clients had found being in prison a better option than trying to get by in a boarding house environment.

Many of the clients who saw boarding houses or emergency shelters as detrimental to ex-prisoners also acknowledged that they were usually the only options for people with little money and no family or other support. The clients were generally not critical of the intentions behind people or organisations providing these accommodation options. Some clients were critical of boarding house landlords who they saw as more concerned with making money than providing clean and safe living conditions.

At the same time, a number of clients indicated they found boarding houses a positive option as they provide a form of stability and independent living at a cheap rent. Some clients had found boarding houses that were quiet and free of drug and alcohol use and had been able to live comfortably in these environments for a period of years. As noted earlier, the four clients living in boarding houses at the time of interview had no immediate plans to leave.

Several clients suggested they did not think that any particular types of accommodation were unsuitable for ex-prisoners, rather that there were specific geographic areas that ex-prisoners should avoid. These were particular low socio-economic areas, with high rates of drug use and criminal behaviour, where many negative people and other influences were seen to congregate. Clients however recognised that it could be very difficult to find accommodation outside these areas.

### **Advice for a person soon to be released from prison**

Clients were asked, based on their knowledge and experiences, what advice they could give to someone who was just about to be released from prison and was worried about where he or she was going to live.

The main point of advice offered by many clients was that a person in this position should be careful not to return to their old associations. They felt that a newly released prisoner who made contact with old friends and went back to the same area where they had previously lived and offended had little prospect of not re-offending. Some felt that even returning on one occasion could be enough to leave the person faced with temptations and pressures that could lead to re-offending and behaviours such as drug and alcohol use. While many noted that it was difficult to establish new friendships and find accommodation away from certain low socio-economic and high crime rate areas, a newly released prisoner had to make these efforts if he or she was serious about changing their life.

Related to this, many clients pointed to the importance of a newly released prisoner finding support and assistance as soon as they could after release, or arranging it before release if possible. Many indicated that support was critical to positive lifestyle changes and that a lack of support was the main reason many people re-offended and returned to prison. These clients were very strong in their advice that a prisoner approaching release, or immediately after release, needed to do whatever they could to find out about avenues of support and make use of whatever services were available.

A number of clients also referred to the importance of a newly released prisoner finding positive activities to keep them from being bored. Many had themselves found boredom a factor in their offending behaviours. Finding work, if possible, was seen as a very positive way to keep occupied.

Several clients talked about the need for recently released prisoners to be careful in their use of money and not blow it all straight away.

### Conclusions — finding accommodation

It has been emphasised throughout this section that the nature of the agencies participating in this study tended to have a very big influence on the information given by clients about their accommodation experiences. Virtually by definition, the nature of the agencies participating in the research determined the nature of the accommodation the clients were living in at the time of interview. This to an extent is self-evident and does not in itself lead to any particular conclusions.

What the differential involvement of agencies does is highlight the considerable differences between the experiences and expectations of clients receiving close support from a dedicated accommodation agency, and those who were receiving support and assistance but not necessarily in an intensive and individually case managed way.

Clients living in supported accommodation, or in accommodation which a support agency had helped them access, were in positions where they could start dealing with the issues of returning to and establishing themselves in the community. They could start working towards employment and dealing with problems such as illicit drug use. These clients seemed in a far better position to do this than clients in less stable accommodation situations. Clients in stable accommodation were far more positive in their expectations of where they would be living in the future, and seemed placed to be more realistic and certain in these expectations.

Most of the clients in supported accommodation had the advantage of leaving prison with a clear idea of where they would be living. Those who did not leave prison with accommodation arranged were far more likely to be living in unstable accommodation at the time of interview. This finding supports the need for greater resources to expand the capacity of support agencies to access potential clients while they are still in the prison system and have accommodation arranged for them by the time they are released. As noted elsewhere, this is not an easy thing to implement but, given the apparent relationship between a lack of stable accommodation and criminal offending, consideration of the possibilities of moving in this direction are clearly warranted.

There is also a case for more resources to assist ex-prisoners to establish themselves in a household once they find stable accommodation. It emerged from the interviews with clients, as it did with staff, that many ex-prisoners find themselves returning to the community with only the most meagre of possessions and without many of the goods necessary to establish a basic household. In some cases, they may never have had these material goods, while in other cases they lost them while in custody. Either way, having a basic array of goods is essential for self-esteem and for facilitating and motivating a return to the community. Agencies who are better resourced to assist ex-prisoner clients with accessing these possessions will be better placed to assist these clients establish themselves in the community.

It is apparent that the relationship between offending and accommodation is problematic, primarily due to the confounding influence of illicit drug use on both variables. What emerges though is that many clients in this survey experienced considerable instability in their lives across a number of dimensions, including accommodation instability. While there is clearly a relationship between accommodation instability, illicit drug use and criminal offending, it is difficult at least within the designs of this survey, to attribute cause and effect within this relationship. It is apparent that for some clients accommodation instability led them into situations or states of mind highly conducive to drug use and offending. For others, accommodation instability resulted from illicit drug use and other offending. For most clients though it seems that accommodation, drugs and crime were all parts of a complex inter-relationship in which prior institutionalisation, abuse, intellectual disability and mental health issues and disadvantage at many levels were all components.

It will never be easy from a policy or social action perspective to intervene within the complexities of these relationships. The findings of this survey strongly suggest though that increased levels of intervention that address problems with accommodation can serve to disrupt other components of the relationship in that ways that will positively impact on levels of offending among clients.

Based on the views of ex-prisoner clients, the most useful direct accommodation interventions are likely to be those that give releasing prisoners a wider range of options beyond those presently available. In particular, options for low-priced accommodation other than boarding house environments would be valuable. This is not to say that all boarding houses are problematic, and some ex-prisoner clients are able to establish stable long-term tenancy if they find the right residence. The

close co-location of former prisoners and others with drug and alcohol problems, in environments that challenge what may be limited coping and anger management skills, will inevitably attract problems and impact on former prisoners trying to return to the community on a limited basis. There appears to be a need for greater options for ex-prisoner clients to find affordable accommodation in environments with fewer other people around them and fewer pressures leading them towards problem behaviours.

Where these facilities are located will also be an important factor, with greater distribution of ex-prisoners across different areas of the community likely to impact positively on individual outcomes.

## **Use of SAAP services**

In this section of the interview, clients were asked a number of questions which sought to provide an understanding of their use of SAAP and other services. Through this the research team hoped to find what services clients were using, currently and in the past, and identify some patterns in their use of these services. The study also sought to reveal the information or other pathways that led clients to accessing these services, including pathways originating within the prison system. The interviews also sought to gain clients' views on whether there were gaps in service provision.

### **Services clients were currently using**

In the first part, clients were asked what services they were using, or had gone to, for help with finding accommodation and other issues concerned with getting themselves set-up in the community.

The responses given by clients in this part were almost entirely dependent on the nature of their main supporting agency, where they had one, and reflected the scope of the services offered by this agency. On this basis, the clients and their responses tended to fall very strongly into one of two categories — those who were receiving ongoing, individually case-managed support and those who were receiving either occasional support for specific needs or no individualised support. These two categories created a clear delineation not only in the way clients were using services, but also in their perceptions of their service needs.

It is in the nature of the agencies participating in this research that all clients in New South Wales, South Australia and Victoria identified the participating agency as the primary or sole service they were using. These are agencies providing intensive, individualised case management services. These services provide clients with accommodation, ranging from short-term crisis accommodation through to medium term housing. The services also assist and facilitate clients' moves into sustainable long-term housing.

These agencies also provide daily living support, sometimes in a very intensive way. They assist clients with accessing services provided by government agencies such as Centrelink and the state housing organisation as well as services provided by non-government agencies such as community housing. The agencies assist clients with their re-entry to the community through assistance with budgeting and financial management, living skills and seeking employment. These agencies assist

clients to address drug-use and other offending-related problems through either direct provision of programs or referrals. Depending on the nature of the service and the clients' needs, the agencies may also provide support such as assistance with shopping or recreational activities.

Most of the female clients of OARS SA also nominated another community agency as one of the main services they were using. OARS SA does not directly operate any women's accommodation, although it does for men. The women's accommodation service of OARS SA works with other accommodation services and options to meet client needs.

Given the degree of support provided by these agencies, it is to be expected that clients of these services nominated them as the major, or often only, service they were using. Many clients stated simply that their agency was giving them every form of support they needed. In some cases clients nominated government agencies such as Centrelink, the state housing organisation or the state community corrections or probation and parole service as another service they were using and receiving help from. Some clients also nominated government or non-government agencies that were providing them with drug and alcohol, mental health, disability, employment or vocational services.

The manner and frequency with which clients were using services depended to a very large extent on how long they had been supported by the service and how far they had progressed through any stages of support the agency's model of service offered. In some cases, the level and complexity of the client's needs was also a factor.

Therefore, a number of the clients interviewed were receiving support on a daily basis, sometimes spending several hours of the day with their support worker. As CRC's hostel operates with a resident duty worker, clients staying at this hostel were able to access support 24 hours a day, seven days a week. Clients of this and other services would typically need a lot of intensive support during the few days or weeks when they first joined the service, especially if they had come straight from prison. This might continue until basic needs such as identification and other documentation, social security payments, bank accounts and medical needs were addressed or stabilised.

Generally the intensity of support needed would lessen after this initial period and would gradually reduce as the client's capacity to live independently increased and their return to the community became more stable. Over time, a client's need for support might gradually reduce from daily support to weekly or monthly. Similarly, the level of support needed might reduce from direct support and direct provision of services, to just advice or 'keeping in touch'.

Depending on the agency's service model, clients might progress to longer term housing, either operated or facilitated by the agency. This housing was typically public or community housing, but might be private housing in some cases. If the agency offered outreach services, these might continue for some time if needed. For instance, clients referred for interview by the San Miguel Family Centre had progressed to a point where they were living with their families in long-term public housing, needing only a minor level of outreach support every month or so.

In some cases an intensive level of support would have to be maintained for much longer, such as for those clients of the Salvation Army's Community Outreach Service (COS) with multiple, complex needs. In other cases a client otherwise requiring only a small amount of support might require intensive support during times of crisis.

The scenario was quite different for clients interviewed in Brisbane and Bunbury. The services in these locations — the homeless men's hostel operated by Ozcare in South Brisbane and the In Town Centre — did not offer individually case managed support or the type of daily living support and assistance offered by the other agencies.

Clients interviewed at the Ozcare hostel varied in which of the hostel's services they were using. Only three of the ten clients interviewed at the hostel were actually staying there. Two of these clients said they were getting assistance from hostel staff with finding longer-term accommodation. Only one stated he was receiving meals and accessing hygiene facilities at the hostel, though it is likely the other two were as well.

The other seven clients interviewed at the hostel were not staying there. While each was coming to the hostel for meals, they did not clearly indicate how regularly they were doing so. Four of the clients stated they were showering at the hostel, though it is possible the others were as well but simply did not think to mention it. None of these clients referred to the medical services provided at the hostel. The one female client interviewed at the hostel was squatting, but came to the hostel regularly for meals and showers. While the hostel was mandated to provide services to homeless males, it regularly had female clients coming for meals, showers and medical services and chose not to refuse females these services. Some of the female clients of the hostel were relatives or partners of men who were staying there.

While one client who ate meals at the hostel was staying in a boarding house, the other clients were homeless and not staying in the hostel. Most of these clients were squatting in empty buildings, while one slept with his relatives in the grounds of the hostel, outside one of the entrances. Some of these clients said they did not have enough money to pay for a bed at the hostel. In other cases, the clients appeared to be choosing homelessness rather than spending their money on a hostel bed. One client said it seemed to him a waste to pay money just so you could have a bed to sleep in, when that money could be better spent on other things.

Due to the nature of its services, the hostel's client group was highly transient in nature. At the time of interview, the average length of stay was 26 days but this was highly variable. Many clients, whether ex-prisoners or not, would only stay for a night until they arranged accommodation elsewhere. Others would stay for weeks. A staff member noted that the population tended to fluctuate in line with fortnightly social security payments. Many clients would leave the hostel when they got paid, as they would have the money for boarding house or similar accommodation. Sometimes these clients would return later in the fortnight when their money had run out. Other clients would not return, because they had found other accommodation or because of some other critical change in their circumstances, such as being taken into custody.



### **Pathways to current services**

Two questions in this section sought to establish the pathways by which clients came to be using their current services by asking why they chose to use the service, and how they found out about the service.

The pathways that led clients to their current services were closely related to the nature of the service and the degree of individualised support the service offered. For those services offering structured and individually case-managed support, clients came to these services through the agencies' own efforts or its reputation. For other services, word of mouth and local knowledge played important roles in clients becoming aware of the agencies and their services.

Clients of CRC came to know of the service mostly through prison welfare officers or other prison program staff. Five of the six clients cited these sources of information, with one also saying that staff of the agency had come into the prison to present information about the service. The other client had learned about the agency from pamphlets in the prison.

The two clients of the San Miguel Family Centre, which provides supported accommodation for families in difficult situations, had both been referred by the NSW Department of Community Services (DoCS). These referrals came independently of the justice system, though the clients' drug-use problems, and their related involvement with the criminal justice system, were certainly factors mandating DoCS involvement and hence referral to San Miguel.

In South Australia, clients of OARS SA learned about that agency largely as a consequence of its long history of operation and good reputation amongst prison staff. Four clients of the agency said they had learned about the agency by word of mouth from other prisoners. Three clients had been referred to the agency by prison staff, while another been referred from a personal support program she said was run by Centrelink in the prison. Three clients said they had put in a request to see an agency staff member after seeing the agency's pamphlets in prison.

Clients of the Salvation Army's Community Outreach Services had mostly been referred through the Salvation Army's role in providing clergy and visiting services to prisoners and, for three of the clients, as a result of the agency's specialist role of providing support to ex-prisoners with multiple, complex needs. One client of this service had not been referred while in prison, but from hospital where he was receiving mental health treatment. This client noted that, if not for this referral, he would have been homeless upon leaving the hospital. This suggests that pathways into homelessness for ex-prisoners may, at least in some cases, be echoed in pathways into homelessness for people leaving other institutions in disadvantaged situations.

The pathways to agencies were quite different for those 17 clients not receiving individualised support. Fifteen of these clients, including all clients of the In Town Centre in Bunbury, said they knew about the agencies from having lived in the area and knowing what places were around. Many of these clients also mentioned they had heard about the agency through word of mouth from other homeless people. Only

one client had been referred to the Ozcare Centre by another agency — specifically from a list of services given to him by a local charitable service — while one had been referred by the court and was staying at the shelter as a bail condition.

It appears that for ex-prisoners not receiving individualised support, pathways into services are largely opportunistic and a matter of what they come to know about through informal channels. There appears to be little choice involved in their decisions to make use of these services. For some it is a matter of making use of services that are reasonably accessible within a loosely defined geographical area. Others suggested that there was simply not any other alternatives they knew of. In either case, it appeared that clients were not choosing to use the service through any kind of evaluative assessment of options. Rather they were responding to basic needs for shelter and nutrition by using whatever services they were reasonably able to access. In many cases, their use of the services fluctuated depending on what other sources of shelter and nutrition were temporarily available. While a very small number of clients talked about using the agency as a basis for making changes in their lives, clients generally did not appear to see the service as being involved in a process of change, or a process of integrating the client into the community in a different way.

The situation was apparently quite different for those clients receiving individualised support. For those clients, their contact with the service provider was, in most cases, the result of a conscious decision to make efforts towards a significant change in the client's circumstances after imprisonment. This decision may have been made by the client themselves, or another person involved in the correctional system may have decided to refer the client to the service. In either case, a conscious decision had been made that the service could assist in helping the client re-enter the community. Given the small number of services specifically working with prisoners, clients did not really have a choice of which service to go to. Rather the choice was whether to accept support or not.

### **Use of services in the past**

Generally, clients' use of other services was limited and sporadic. Those services used were mostly church or charitable organisation-based services. Eleven of the 41 clients indicated they had made occasional use of food and clothing services provided by organisations such as the Salvation Army, St Vincent de Paul, the Wesley Central Mission or the Smith Family. Some of these clients also said they had received financial assistance, such as money for fares, from these organisations. Clients experiencing past homelessness, who also used services such as food vans on a reasonably regular basis, mainly used these services. A number of these clients had also made occasional use of emergency accommodation such as shelters operated by these organisations.

Some additional clients also indicated they had used emergency accommodation on limited occasions in the past, but did not indicate any use of other food or clothing services.

Clients making use of church-based and charitable services in the past were quite non-specific about the frequency with which they used these services or how they

came to access them. The general impression given was that clients would make sporadic or intermittent use of services whenever specific needs arose or they could not make do using independent resources. Clients appeared to become aware of these services through word of mouth or through living in and around particular areas rather than through any specific referral channels.

A few remaining clients who indicated they had previously received help from their currently supporting agencies or from government agencies such as Centrelink or housing agencies. Those clients who had previously used their supporting agencies had done so for services other than accommodation, such as assistance with food vouchers or other one-off assistance.

The remainder of clients in this group indicated they had not previously used any services. Some of these clients had been in situations of stable accommodation and income in the past and had not needed to use welfare or support services. Others had been in less stable situations but indicated they had relied on using their own means. Some of these clients suggested they could have made use of services but preferred to get by themselves and rely on their own limited resources.

Overall, there appeared to be a fairly clear line of separation within this client group between those people who had made extensive, though sporadic, use of support services and those who through choice or lack of need had not used services at all.

#### **Assistance available within the prison system**

Clients were asked what programs, information or other services were available inside the prison system to assist them with finding and keeping accommodation. They were then asked how much this varied from one prison to another and which of the available programs, advice or other services they took up. If there were programs, advice or other services the client did not take up, the client was asked why this was the case.

A majority of clients (n=24 or approximately 59%) said there were no programs available to them in prison to help with accommodation or other aspects of returning to the community. A number of other clients suggested there was some help available but were not necessarily clear about what form this may have taken.

Most of the clients who said there were no programs available indicated they had not received any form of advice or assistance at all to assist with accommodation or other post-release issues. A number of these clients felt they had been very much on their own and expected to cope with returning to the community without any preparation or assistance. Some suggested they had been able to undertake some programs peripherally related to returning to the community, such as rehabilitative programs or some that assisted them with basic employment skills, but others said there was nothing available to them at all. As one client put it, 'all I ever learned to do in prison was how to watch TV and how to do crime better'.

Some clients said they had picked up some information from pamphlets giving information about support agencies. Some had received assistance from welfare or liaison officers. Some clients noted that the nature of their imprisonment, such as receiving only a short sentence, being on remand or being in maximum security

as an escapee, precluded them being able to access any programs that might have been available. Other said there may have been programs or assistance available, but they either did not feel they needed it, felt it would not help anyway or they did not make any effort to find out about what was available.

A number of clients suggested there was assistance available, but that an individual had to work hard to get access to it. Some suggested that prisoners had to make 'a real nuisance' of themselves to get access to programs or assistance.

These responses contrasted sharply with the small number of clients (n=6 or approximately 15%) who said they had been through programs specifically designed to assist them with preparing for release and re-entering the community. Clients in four of the five states visited reported they had undertaken specific programs. Each indicated this had been of assistance to them.

Client reports of whether the availability of assistance varied between different prisons tended to follow their response to whether there was any assistance available in the first place. Those that said there was nothing available tended to think that was the case everywhere, and there was nothing available in any of the prisons they had served in or knew about. Those who had done specific programs thought the program was available in any of the particular states' facilities. A number of clients did refer to perceived differences between facilities, suggesting there was no assistance available in remand or maximum security and some female clients referring to a lack of programs in women's prisons.

Clients did not indicate they experienced any particular barriers to them taking up available programs or assistance. As noted above, a number of clients said they would not have taken up any available assistance because they did not think they needed help, were cynical about whether it would be of any benefit or because the duration and nature of their custody prevented it.

There was no discernible relationship between how long it had been since a client was released from prison and whether they believed there was any assistance available to them, although it is likely that clients in prison more recently would have had more assistance available.

Although a majority of clients reported that they did not have access to assistance with accommodation matters while in prison, this cannot necessarily be taken as an indication of whether this assistance was in fact available. A strong theme to emerge from this question, and from other questions relating to clients' use of non-prison services, is that there is a good deal of variation between clients in whether or not they choose to make use of services or assistance available to them. It emerges from these responses that some clients prefer to try and solve their problems themselves, without assistance, even if they do not seem to be successful in doing so. Some clients are wary of being controlled by those offering assistance while others, or are cynical about whether they will actually benefit from the assistance. Others, through a lack of their own or others' efforts, do not become aware of assistance they could potentially access.

### **Perceived gaps in service provision**

Clients were asked whether, based on what they now knew and what they had seen, they thought there were things missing that could be really helpful to people coming out of prison and needing to find accommodation or other help. A number of themes emerged from these responses.

#### **Gaps in accommodation availability**

Many clients saw a lack of emergency accommodation as a major gap in service. This was an issue for most female clients, especially those with child-care responsibilities. A number of clients, both male and female, saw accommodation availability as being a critical factor in preventing ex-prisoners from re-offending. Some also cited accommodation as being the key to preventing some people from being held in remand.

A number of clients suggested that the availability of more supported accommodation, particularly in the form of half-way houses, was a major issue. These clients saw that half-way houses would provide a chance for ex-prisoners to adjust to living independently and making decisions, while still providing components of the structure and rules they had adjusted to in prison. Some clients also saw a subsidised halfway-house as being a place where newly released prisoners could stabilise their finances, lifestyles and other aspects of their re-integration into the community.

#### **Peer support**

Several clients identified peer support as something that would be particularly helpful for ex-prisoners. These clients felt that former prisoners, who had successfully returned to the community, would be able to provide valuable and insightful advice and understand fully the issues that ex-prisoners faced. An alternative was the establishment of more services specifically targeting ex-prisoners.

#### **Financial management assistance**

Many clients identified a need for greater assistance with helping people budget and manage their limited finances on release from prison. Most of these clients saw a lack of money as being one of the main problems facing people on release and saw the first few weeks as being a particularly difficult and vulnerable period. Some clients said that people had no choice but to steal as the money they had would not cover rent and food. Only a small number of clients suggested increasing Centrelink payments as a way of addressing this, though. Most suggested programs, either inside or outside prison, to help people budget and manage their finances better so they did not spend all their money within a few days after release.

#### **General support**

A number of clients identified the need for more avenues of general support, especially daily living support, mentoring and advice. More assistance with finding employment was also mentioned by several clients. Depending on the kind of support they were currently receiving, clients tended to suggest either new sources of support or expanding existing agencies. Some clients were fairly specific about suggesting the need for more avenues of support that followed progressive pathways, with defined goals.

Many clients saw a strong link between the need for more support and levels of offending, with many suggesting that having more support available for prisoners on release would directly reduce the rate of re-offending.

### **Information about services**

A number of clients at the homeless men's shelter saw the need for more information, both within prison and in the community, on available services. They felt there were services available to meet every need, but that disadvantaged people did not necessarily know about them or how to access them.

A number of other clients also indicated they felt there were services available for every need and did not see any gaps. Some of these clients suggested that if people were not using the services it was through their own choices and they could get help if they wanted it.

### **Conclusions – use of SAAP services**

Within this survey there was a clear delineation in the way different client groups used SAAP and other services, and the way they came to find out about them. Clients who were using the different agencies that provided individualised case management support on an on-going basis came to find out about those agencies and become their clients largely through the direct efforts of the agencies, or through information networks and reputations established through many years of work. Clients of these agencies were able to access the full range of ongoing support they needed and generally did not need support from other agencies, except through associations and referral from their main supporting agency. Pathways to support for these clients were generally direct and their use of the services ongoing and linked to their level of need.

Clients not being supported by these agencies were more irregular and less defined in their pathways and use of services. Both currently and in the past these clients tended to access services to address specific needs and would access them for as long as that specific need remained. Clients did not generally seem to be concerned with establishing ongoing relationships with services and some resisted the idea of using any kind of service as much as possible.

On one level there is a greater need for information, within the prison system and in the community, about services available to help ex-prisoners. By virtue of this study's methodology, all clients interviewed were accessing services to some extent. There may well be a considerable number of ex-prisoners in the community, or who had been in the community and since returned to prison, who could benefit from a greater understanding of avenues of support available to them. Not all will be interested, but there will be some who could use this information to good advantage. Disseminating information about services does carry the risk of already limited resources within agencies becoming even more stretched.

On another level, many ex-prisoners will find ways to access services they need without any further information. Local knowledge and word of mouth seem particularly effective in letting clients access services they need to survive. These may not be the types of services that are able to give clients ongoing support or add

increased levels of stability to their lives, but they are invaluable in meeting immediate needs. Through providing basic necessities such as temporary accommodation, food, clothing or medical assistance at critical times these agencies contribute to improved health, well-being and safety outcomes for ex-prisoners and no doubt prevent re-offending in some cases. Many of these services are peripheral to the accommodation sector but assist the sector by meeting needs that arise when the limited accommodation options available are not sufficient or appropriate to meet an individual's circumstances.

Clients' responses in this section reflect client and staff views elsewhere, indicating the need for a greater range of accommodation options and support. In particular services that understand and are equipped to respond to the particular needs and issues of ex-prisoners are seen as necessary by the ex-prisoner client group.

It would be helpful if some of this targeted support could begin within the prison system, either through institutional staff or external agencies providing services within the prison. Where agencies are able to reach prisoners before release, the outcomes for those prisoners seem particularly positive.

The finding that most ex-prisoner clients did not feel they had access to assistance with finding and keeping accommodation or other post-release matters suggests that more may need to be done within the prison to put prisoners in contact with available assistance. The findings of this study suggest that rehabilitative outcomes for ex-prisoners are much better if they receive assistance and support to prevent them from re-offending or becoming homeless. It may be that more assistance needs to be made available where it is not currently, through developing programs and applying more resources. Or it may mean making it easier for prisoners to access assistance, or doing more to encourage prisoners to seek assistance and educate them about the benefits they can gain.

In suggesting this, it is recognised that correctional staff cannot require prisoners to access assistance if they do not wish to, that security considerations place constraints on how prisoners' activities can be structured and that a proportion of prisoners will always choose not to take up assistance available to them. At the same time, there is an imperative to maximise prisoners' access to assistance, and acceptance of that assistance, as much as reasonably possible.

## **Children and family**

The interview instrument included a brief section where clients were asked about their relationship status, whether they had any children and issues around partners and children living with the client.

As the interviewers explained to clients before this section, the intention of these questions was to get an idea of how having a partner or children changed the issues for ex-prisoners trying to find accommodation. Clients were told that the questions were not about invading the person's privacy and the interviewer would not be asking for any names or personal details about the client's family.

The current project was not seeking to examine issues around homelessness for women and children in depth, but to simply understand basic core issues for this

client group and provide a starting point for further investigation or to build on previous work.

No client declined to answer the questions in this section, nor did any client appear to have any concern or anxiety about answering the questions. In the case of two clients — one a transgendered person and the other a client identified as a sex offender by his supporting agency — the interviewer considered that asking these questions may cause some distress to the client and deemed it appropriate not to ask the questions. In both cases this was discussed with the client's support worker who agreed with this approach. In both cases the support worker volunteered that the client was single and had no children.

### **Children**

Approximately half the clients in this group (n=21) had children. Six of the nine female clients interviewed had children. Fifteen of the 32 male clients had children.

Five of the clients in this group had one child each, six had two children each and five clients each had three children. Five of the clients had five or more children each.

### **Relationships**

Of the 21 children with clients, 16 identified as being single (not in a relationship). Three clients with children stated they were in a relationship but not living together, while two were married/defacto (living together). This distribution of relationship types can be attributed to the nature of the supporting agencies as involved as most targeted single persons. One agency's client group was families and the two clients interviewed through this service both reported as married and living together with one or more of their children. In the case of the remaining clients, who were in relationships, this relationship did not appear to necessarily be with a parent of any of the children.

### **Accommodation problems and access to children**

For many of the clients who had children, their lack of stable, and perhaps more importantly independent, accommodation was a direct barrier to their relationship with their children. Ten of the 21 clients, all male, cited a lack of stable accommodation as a major issue in being able to have their children live or stay with them. Six of these clients said they were hoping to be able to have their children live with them or stay with them once they had their own place, or more stable accommodation. Some of these clients acknowledged that having the children living with them was not a realistic option whatever their situation, but also recognised they could not even have their children stay overnight until they had more suitable accommodation. One client said he was working towards having a place where his three children could safely and comfortably spend the night. He said he wanted his children to be able to talk with him about their problems but that he could only have a shallow relationship with them now, only seeing them for a few hours at a time.

A small number of clients were in a position where they wanted more contact with their children, but were not even considering this until they had more appropriate accommodation. One client had tried in the past to get custody of his two children but had failed due to a lack of stable accommodation and his criminal history. Another



said it was not even worth bothering to go to court for access until he had more appropriate accommodation where his daughter could have her own room, unlike in the hostel where he was living.

For some other clients, accommodation was not an issue in why their children did not live or stay with them. One client just said that having his daughter live with him hasn't been an option regardless of accommodation. One client, who had been homeless most of his life and was homeless at the time of interview, said he had never tried to have any of his five children live with him. One client said simply that his children are better off with their mother.

Overall, seven clients reported they had their children living with them before they went into prison. Two of these clients had children living with them at the time of interview while five of them no longer did. There were also three clients who had not been able to have their children living with them before they went to prison, but did at the time of interview. For two of these clients, controlling their drug use and the help of their supporting agency were the critical factors that had made this possible.

The relationship between accommodation and offending, particularly drug use, in affecting access and custody of children is, as with similar relationships found in this study, a complex one. In many cases it is difficult to isolate the roles of offending, drug use and unstable accommodation in preventing clients from being able to maintain a higher level of contact with their children.

A number of male clients clearly attributed the breakdown of their relationship with their children to drug use, whether it be their own drug use, the mother's drug use or both. Two clients stated they had signed custody of their children over to their parents-in-law and were happy to do so in the best interests of the child. One client had his six children living with him when interviewed, but had previously lost custody of them to foster care for three years, while he worked through his drug problems and, with the help of his supporting agency, began to stabilise his life. A female client had her three children taken into foster care when she was imprisoned three months before and, at the time of interview, had another 12 months to wait before she could get them back. One client had seen her daughter only twice in the two years since she had been arrested while another's children had been taken overseas by their father while she was in prison.

### **Movement of partners**

Clients were asked:

If you are living with a partner and/or with children, did they move to the area you are now living to be with you?

This question sought to examine whether there was a possible impact on SAAP services in particular areas resulting from families moving to those areas. It was supposed that clients, after their release from prison might come to live in certain areas, marked either by their socio-economic status, availability of public housing or supported accommodation or the proximity of a releasing prison. It was speculated that partners might then move into those areas, possibly bringing children with them, resulting in an increased use of services in those areas.

This effect was not demonstrated in this client group. The vast majority of the group were either single and not in a relationship (n=31; approximately 76%) or in a relationship but not living together (n=7; approximately 17%). There was no suggestion by clients in the latter group that their partners had moved to the local area to be with them. In the case of the three clients who were living with partners, two of them were almost certainly living in the area because the agency that supported them was based in the same area. This was not having any impact on the agency though, beyond the fact that it was providing outreach services to these families as part of its core business. In the other case, the client had not served more than overnight stays in custody and she and her partner had arrived in the area together some time earlier.

The interviewer did encounter one case of a client, living in a supported accommodation hostel, whose girlfriend was coming from interstate to be with him and was expected to arrive at the hostel the day after the interview. This was an issue for staff, who advised that this situation did arise from time to time with their clients and did have some implications for operation of their service. Staff advised that the presence of a female partner in a male hostel could create a range of tensions and jealousies in the household, occasionally resulting in violent confrontations between residents and could also have negative effects on the client, such as through the partner encouraging him into drug use. Staff also said the arrival of the partner could have resource implications for their service or others, as the partner would usually be homeless when she arrived and would often need to be assisted through the limited resources of a women's accommodation service.

While the arrival of partners in these circumstances certainly carried resource implications, caused problems for staff, and disruption for the individual and the service, there was no suggestion that this happened frequently enough to be a major concern for the agency. The issue was not raised by any other service.

### **Conclusions – children and family**

As suggested, the particular role of accommodation instability in preventing many ex-prisoner clients having contact with their children is not easy to establish. As is the case with the relationship between accommodation instability and offending, the problem is complex and multi-faceted. It emerges though that a lack of stable, ongoing accommodation is at least a major fact preventing some ex-prisoner clients from having meaningful relationships with their children. The other factors that come into play, such as offending behaviour, illicit drug use, domestic violence and other components of family breakdown also contribute to this situation.

Providing stable accommodation alone will not bring families back together or allow ex-prisoners to provide good parenting or positive role models to their children. A greater availability of stable accommodation and support for ex-prisoners, especially those seeking to change their lifestyles and establish positive relationships, could help to address some of the ramifications of past behaviours and actions that have led to ex-prisoners becoming alienated from their families. Establishing positive and appropriate relationships with their children could at the same time contribute in many ways to these clients efforts towards lifestyle and behaviour change and help them to better integrate with the general community.

## Appendix C — agency profiles

### **New South Wales — Community Restorative Centre (CRC)**

CRC<sup>13</sup> provides services targeted to prisoners, ex-prisoners and their families. The agency supports adults, both male and female. CRC's SAAP profile shows it operates a multiple service delivery model with a general target focus. The profile does acknowledge a criminal justice involvement against its secondary target group.

CRC provides a staged support model, where clients are able to progress through different types of accommodation with gradually lessening levels of support. At the first level, the agency operates a crisis hostel for single males. Clients have to book in, generally through referral from a prison welfare officer or a parole officer, and stay in the crisis hostel for a three month period, though this is flexible. On arrival, clients are registered for community housing, which has a waiting list of usually around 12 months. During the first week the service concentrates on addressing and stabilising immediate needs such as medication, Centrelink payments, identification and documentation and ensuring the client knows time and location details for critical appointments, such as for parole reporting. Once these immediate and critical needs are being met, the agency begins to work on addressing a full range of issues associated with a gradual return to the community, such as daily living skills, securing employment and supporting clients to address offending behaviour.

Agency support is available at the hostel 24 hours a day, seven days a week with the duty worker sleeping in the hostel. The agency acknowledges there is a high financial cost to providing this level of support, but considers it essential to the success of the service, particularly given the crises that can arise for clients at any time. The agency believes that being able to deal with a critical situation when it arises, rather than possibly only becoming aware of it many hours or even days later, allows many problems to be resolved before they escalate into much more difficult situations.

CRC also operates three medium term houses where clients live alone or share with another client. Clients can remain in these houses for around six to 12 months. Regular and ongoing support, of whatever kind is reasonably needed, is provided throughout this time.

From the medium term houses, clients are able to move into community housing through formal agreements CRC has with a number of community housing providers. Under these agreements, CRC will have a number of community houses allocated to it at any given time, on the condition that the agency agrees to provide support for its clients. The agency continues to provide outreach support to clients for up to 12 months once they have moved into community housing. From this point, the client is able to remain in the house on an ongoing basis and the agency is allocated another community house under the agreements.

CRC also operates a program which operates on a self-help basis to address addiction and related problems by developing goal setting, positive attitudes, problem solving and coping abilities.

While the model described above applies to the agency's single male clients, the agency has also created a position from existing funding as a women's worker. The agency has found there is little accommodation available for female ex-prisoners, especially those with children. While there are some refuges, these are seen by the agency as essentially an extension of the prison system.

<sup>13</sup> This agency was known as CRC Justice Support at the time this research was undertaken. The agency has subsequently changed its name to that shown.

The agency is able to assist female clients through their agreements with community housing services. Women with children are able to be assisted straight into community housing. Outreach support is provided for 12 months and then clients remain in the houses, in the same way as single male clients are able to.

While CRC targets all adult prisoners and ex-prisoners and their families, it is not able to offer support to persons convicted of sexual offences against minors. This is purely because the agency could not guarantee the safety of these offenders in any group or shared house situation.

Due to the specific nature of the agency's target group, essentially 100 percent of the agency's clients are prisoners or ex-prisoners. On occasions close family members of prisoners or ex-prisoners will be assisted, as well as occasionally people who are facing criminal offences and seek assistance on the basis that they may have to serve a term of imprisonment.

The agency has monitored its own success rates over recent years and has found that around 70 per cent of the 70 to 80 men it accommodates per year do not return to prison. Among the eight to 10 women it supports, the recidivism rate has been nil in the last several years.

### **New South Wales — San Miguel Family Centre**

The San Miguel Family Centre is identified in SAAP administrative data as operating under multiple service delivery models with families as a primary target group.

The San Miguel Family Centre is a short-term family crisis accommodation refuge owned and operated as a charitable work by the De La Salle Brothers. It offers families (women and/or men with children) a refuge from abusive and highly stressful situations for up to approximately eight weeks. It is located on a 50 hectare property in a peaceful rural area north-west of Sydney.

The Centre provides accommodation consisting of 11 two bedroom, self-contained units as well as an emergency unit providing overnight shelter. For residents the Centre provides courses such as family and individual counselling, drug and alcohol counselling, parenting skills and training in life skills such as health, hygiene, cooking, budgeting as well as basic work skills and literacy. The Centre provides outreach support through a Relocation Team to support former residents in adjusting to their new lifestyle.

The Centre does not specifically target ex-prisoner clients and only a component of the Centre's clients have served a term of imprisonment. In these cases, the imprisonment in itself is not a basis for referral or the offering of support, but the experience of imprisonment, or the behaviour that led to it, may be a factor contributing to the need for support.

### **Queensland — Ozcare St Vincent's Homeless Person's Centre**

Ozcare St Vincent's Homeless Person's Centre in South Brisbane, is identified in SAAP administrative data as operating multiple service delivery models targeted at single men.

The Ozcare Centre provides services to homeless adult men. The Centre offers affordable overnight accommodation together with cheap meals and hygiene facilities such as showers. The hostel also offers a drop-in medical centre and a four bed in-patient detox service. Workers at the Centre offer clients assistance with finding accommodation and referral to other services and Government agencies as well as minor transportation, financial management assistance and general assistance with seeking employment and other issues including recreational activities. Client service representatives from Centrelink and the state housing organisation also visit the Centre on a regular basis to assist clients accessing those organisation's services.

The Centre provides a stable base for men to stay until they can find their own accommodation and work. It provides them with a base to work from and a telephone number to assist in finding employment. The Centre also provides stable accommodation for people while they are undertaking detoxification and rehabilitation and provides ongoing drug and alcohol support through its medical centre.

The Centre caters to any homeless men and does not target ex-prisoners.

### **South Australia — Offenders Aid and Rehabilitation Services of South Australia (OARS SA)**

OARS SA is noted on SAAP administrative data as operating both outreach and multiple service delivery models. It is reflected within this data as targeting single men, though the agency also operates a womens' accommodation and assistance service for women and their dependent children.

OARS SA directly provides accommodation services for ex-prisoners through a number of supported accommodation facilities. The agency operates supported accommodation beds, hostels and single or shared community units. The agency operates hostel accommodation in a number of locations, linked to the location of prisons. The agency also operates medium term individual accommodation, supported through outreach services. Support workers manage the hostels throughout business hours but do not have 24 hour a day resident management.

OARS SA offers a full range of daily living support services including drug and alcohol counselling, financial management, referral to other services, case management and Drug Court management services. The agency provides services to whoever needs them, but essentially caters to prisoners and ex-prisoners. The agency also works with partners and families of offenders and works with people at risk of offending. In the past the agency has operated a service for long-term unemployed people, considered at risk of offending, but no longer has funding for this service. Clients do not have to be accommodated with the agency to access the agency's range of daily living services.

The women's service of OARS SA is not funded to provide accommodation for women, but operates two properties through a partnership with the state housing organisation. The women's service is funded to provide case management and support for women and children and through outreach services is able to provide intensive case management support for women with complex needs. While a proportion of female clients are themselves offenders, the agency also supports partners and families of offenders, with many female partners of male offenders and their children becoming homeless as a result of the man's incarceration.

## **Victoria — Salvation Army Community Outreach Services (COS)**

The Salvation Army Family Support Service is identified as providing medium and longer-term accommodation within SAAP administrative data and catering to families as a primary target group. The division of the service participating in this research operates multiple service delivery models and primarily targets single men and women.

COS is based in an inner suburb of Melbourne and provides services to homeless and disadvantaged people in the western region of Melbourne.

The agency provides short-term crisis, medium-term and long-term accommodation services and has nomination rights through the Salvation Army and community housing. It is able to access transition managed housing which provides a stepping stone to public housing through the state Housing Commission.

As well as accommodation services, COS provides services such as material aid, in the form of food vouchers, transportation, advocacy and recreation activities.

While COS is a generalist service and does not specifically cater to ex-prisoners, a proportion of its mainstream clients have histories that include offending and imprisonment. Ex-prisoner clients can access the full range of services COS offers, but tend to mainly access accommodation services as their first and foremost priority. COS has also developed a specialist niche supporting ex-prisoners with multiple complex needs who other services cannot or will not support. Through this specialist service COS has assisted in facilitating the release on parole of a number of offenders who had been eligible for parole for an extended period but could not be released as there was no agency able to offer them support, and offenders who would have been in this situation if not for COS offering them support.

## **Western Australia — In Town Centre**

The In Town Centre operates under a day support service delivery model catering to a general primary target group.

The In Town Centre, also known as the Shoestring Café, is located in the small coastal city of Bunbury, Western Australia. The Centre's mandated role is to provide affordable meals for disadvantaged clients. It also provides emergency relief in the form of food parcels and essential items such as blankets and towels. The Centre also provides an opportunity for clients to have social contact with other clients, while staff members provide a 'listening ear' and informal referrals to various services, including referral and advocacy for accommodation. Staff from various government and non-government agencies including Centrelink, the state housing agency, drug and alcohol services and a nursing sister also provide regular customer service visits to the centre.

The Centre is non-specific in its target group and assists the homeless and disadvantaged of all ages and both genders. The broad range of clients assisted is important to the Centre's mode of operation as it allows people to interact in a mixed social and familial setting. While the Centre does not specifically target ex-prisoners, a significant proportion of clients have histories including imprisonment, particularly in the Bunbury Regional Prison. Staff estimate that 50 per cent or more of their adult male clients have been imprisoned.

## Appendix D — SAAP staff interview schedule

### **Homelessness, ex-prisoners and SAAP services**

#### **Interview schedule for Staff of SAAP funded services**

##### Introduction

The Australian Institute of Criminology (AIC) is working with the Department of Family and Community Services (FaCS) to investigate issues around ex-prisoners, homelessness, and use of Supported Accommodation Assistance Program (SAAP) services.

The information we get out of this project will help build our knowledge about a client group that clearly has some serious needs. In this research, we hope to:

- ▶ examine some of the pathways to homelessness among ex-prisoners; and
- ▶ begin exploring this client group's use of SAAP services.

I'd like to invite you to take part in an informal interview. If you don't mind, I'll be taking notes while we're talking. What you say will be important and I won't be able to remember everything, so I'll jot down some of the main points as we go along.

We respect your knowledge and experience. We value what you can teach us about the accommodation needs of people coming out of prison and the difficult issues involved in providing services to meet those needs. The information you give will help build up our understanding of this issue and inform policy decisions on SAAP services.

While we might use some of the things you say in our final report, we'll do this in a way that won't identify you or your agency. We'd like you to feel comfortable that you can talk freely, knowing that what you say will be kept confidential.

Hopefully, this information will help make things better for people leaving prison and trying to re-establish themselves in the community and for the services that help them.

Do you have any questions before we begin?

Name of Service .....

Role in the Organisation .....

1. What services does your agency provide?
2. Does this agency target a particular client group, or groups?
3. What proportion of your clients would you estimate are ex-prisoners?
  - a. What type of services do ex-prisoners come in for?
4. What do you see as the major challenges in providing *accommodation* services for ex-prisoners, both for the individuals themselves and for your agency?
  - a. What do you see as the major challenges in providing other (*non-accommodation*) services for ex-prisoners, both for the individuals themselves and for your agency?
5. How are these challenges different from those affecting other client groups?
6. Why do you think ex-prisoners come to your service?
7. Is the provision of services to ex-prisoner clients by your agency in any way affecting the delivery of services to your other non-prisoner clients?

Yes       No

  - a. (If yes) In what way?
8. What is your understanding, or perception, of the programs, advice, information and other services available inside the prison system to help prisoners with finding accommodation?
9. Do you see major gaps in SAAP service provision for ex-prisoners facing homelessness?

Yes       No

  - a. (If yes) What are the gaps?
  - b. What do you find yourself having to do to get around the gaps and provide a good service?
10. Is there anything else you'd like to add that you think could be relevant to our research?



## Appendix E — client interview schedule

### Homelessness, ex-prisoners and SAAP services

#### Interview schedule for ex-prisoner clients of SAAP funded services

##### Introduction

The Australian Institute of Criminology (AIC) is working with the Department of Family and Community Services (FACS) to look at issues to do with ex-prisoners, homelessness, and use of SAAP services. SAAP stands for the Supported Accommodation Assistance Program. It's a program funded by the Commonwealth and State Governments to provide a range of services to people who are homeless or at risk of becoming homeless.

We hope what we find out will help us understand more about the accommodation needs of ex-prisoners. We want to try and find out what kinds of services people are using to help them find or keep somewhere to live once they leave prison. We hope what we find out will help improve services for people leaving prison.

I'd like to invite you to take part in an informal interview. If you don't mind, I'll be taking notes while we're talking. What you say will be important and I won't be able to remember everything, so I'll jot down some of the main points as we go along. Whatever you say will be completely confidential. I won't write down your name or anything else that would identify you.

The things you say might be used in our report but not in a way that would let anyone know that it was you who said them. We'd like you to feel comfortable that you can talk freely, knowing that what you say will be kept confidential.

The only reason we're trying to get this information is to help with the research.

- ▶ We won't be giving the information to the police.
- ▶ We won't be giving the information to anyone in the prison system or in community corrections.
- ▶ We won't be giving the information to Centrelink, or housing or any other agency or service you might have to go to for help.
- ▶ We won't be giving the information to anyone who could use it against you in any way.

Have you got any questions about what we are, or aren't, going to do with the information?

I'll ask you about how many times you've been in prison and when, about where you've lived and problems you've had with finding and keeping somewhere to live. I'll ask about your use of different services. This will include how you came to find out about particular services and what information, programs or support there was in prison to help you with finding somewhere to live when you got out.

I won't be asking you to talk about your offences or your experiences in prison. You won't be expected to talk about anything you find uncomfortable or unpleasant. You'll be free to stop the interview at any time, or have a break, or say you don't want to answer any particular question.

We really appreciate you sharing your experiences with us. The bottom line is that without help from the people who've been there, and have seen what really happens when you get out of prison, we couldn't do the research.

Do you have any questions before we start?

### Part 1: Background Information

The first few questions are to get a bit of an idea about you, but only for statistics, not to identify who you are.

I'll be asking a few things like your age, your source of income (but not how much your income is), your level of education and how you feel generally about your health (but nothing specific about any health problems you might have).

This information will be averaged across the people we speak to, and it's just meant to give a picture of the kinds of people who've shared their information with us.

I'm not going to ask your name or address or anything like that. OK?

Age .....

**Gender**

Female

Male

**Main source of income**

full-time employment

part-time or casual employment

social security payments

other .....

**Highest level of education (not including any qualifications gained in prison)**

no high school

some high school but didn't finish

finished high school

trade or technical qualification

higher tertiary (university)

**Qualifications gained in prison**

none

high school

trade or technical qualification

higher tertiary (university)

Overall, how would you rate your physical health?

1

2

3

4

5

Very Poor

Poor

Fair

Good

Very Good

How would you rate your physical health now, compared to when you (last) left prison?

1

2

3

4

5

Much worse

Worse

About the  
same

Better

Much better

If your physical health has changed since you (last) left prison, why do you think this is?

## Part 2: Prison and release from prison

In the next section, I'll ask you about periods of time you've spent in prison.

I'm not trying to find out why you've been in prison or anything that might have happened to you inside.

I'm just trying to get an idea of how long you've spent in prison. We think the amount of time people have spent in prison might make a difference when they try to find accommodation outside. OK?

1. Have you been in prison more than once?  Yes  No
2. When were you (last) released from prison? ...../...../.....
3. How long did you serve (last time)? months/years (including both remand and sentenced).
  - a. How much of this was remand?
  - b. How much of this was sentenced?
4. Were you released on supervisory conditions?  Yes  No
  - a. (If yes) Are you still under supervision?  Yes  No
5. (If this was not the only time in prison)

Please give an outline of the other periods of imprisonment you have served (including both remand and sentenced and any time served in juvenile detention).

...../...../..... to ...../...../..... or  months / years

...../...../..... to ...../...../..... or  months / years

...../...../..... to ...../...../..... or  months / years

...../...../..... to ...../...../..... or  months / years

...../...../..... to ...../...../..... or  months / years

6. How old were you when you first went into prison (or juvenile detention)?

### Part 3: Finding accommodation

In this section, I'll be asking about accommodation.

I'll be trying to get an idea of the types of accommodation you've lived in and how being in prison has affected you trying to find somewhere to live.

I don't need to know exactly where you've lived, just the type of places.

Your answers will start to give us a good idea of the different problems ex-prisoners face finding accommodation, compared to people who haven't been in prison. OK?

7. Where are you living *now*?

- privately rented home.....
- privately owned home.....
- public housing.....
- shared home (with friends or others).....
- lived with parents or relatives.....
- private hotel or rooming house.....
- supported accommodation.....
- shelter or other temporary accommodation.....
- other type of accommodation.....
- have nowhere to live.....

8. When you came out of prison (the last time) did you try to find accommodation yourself before coming to this service for help?

Yes       No

9. At the time you were leaving prison (the last time), what expectations did you have about your accommodation, such as where you'd be living and who you'd be living with?

10. In reality, what's actually happened? Please tell me about your experiences trying to find accommodation since you got out of prison (the last time) — like where you've stayed, what services you've gone to, what problems you've faced finding somewhere to live.

11. Where were you living *before* you went to prison (the last time)?
- privately rented home.....
  - privately owned home.....
  - public housing.....
  - shared home (with friends or others).....
  - lived with parents or relatives.....
  - private hotel or rooming house.....
  - supported accommodation.....
  - shelter or other temporary accommodation.....
  - other type of accommodation.....
  - had nowhere to live.....
12. Please tell me about your experiences trying to find accommodation in the past (before the last time you went to prison) — like where you've stayed, what services you've gone to, what problems you've faced trying to find somewhere to live.
13. Do you think difficulties with finding and keeping somewhere to live have played a part in your offending? If so, in what way?
- a. On the other hand, do you think your offending has made it difficult for you to find and keep somewhere to live? If so, in what way?
14. Do you think that there are some types of accommodation that are suitable for people who have just left prison, and others that are not so suitable or that ex-prisoners should avoid?
- Yes       No
- a. (If yes) What makes some more suitable than others?
15. How do you think being in prison has affected your accommodation options?
16. Where do you expect to be living in 3 months' time?
- a. What about in 12 months' time?
17. With what you know now and what you've experienced, what advice could you offer to someone who's going to be released from prison soon and who's worried about where they're going to live?

## Part 4: Use of SAAP services

In this section I'll be asking about services or agencies you've gone to for help.

They may be services that have helped you find somewhere to live, or helped you be able to keep somewhere to live.

They might be services you went to, but didn't help you.

I'll also be asking about what was available in the prison system to help you find somewhere to live when you got out.

What you say will be confidential, so you don't have to worry that the services or corrections will find out what you've said. OK?

18. *Thinking about the time since you were (last) released from prison* — what services are you currently using/have you gone to for help with finding accommodation or other issues concerned with getting yourself set-up in the community?
19. Why did you choose these particular services?
20. *Thinking about the time before your (last) period of imprisonment* — what services had you gone to in the past to help you with finding accommodation or other issues concerned with getting yourself set-up in the community?
21. Where and how did you find out about the services you are currently using or that you've gone to before?
22. Inside the prison system, what programs, information or other services were available to assist you with finding or maintaining accommodation?
  - a. How much did this vary from one prison to another?
  - b. Which of these programs, advice or other services did you take up?
  - c. If there were programs, advice or other services you didn't take up - why was this – what were the barriers?
23. From what you've seen of the types of services available to help people find accommodation when they are released from prison, can you see things missing that you know could be really helpful to ex-prisoners? What are they?
24. Is there anything I haven't asked you about, to do with services or information to help you find accommodation, that you'd like to add?

## Part 5: Children and family

In this last section, I'm going to ask you just a few questions about whether you're in a relationship and whether you have any children.

Like all the other questions, this won't be about invading your privacy.

I won't be asking for any names or personal details about your family.

I'm just interested in finding out how having a partner or children changes things for people when they come out of prison and are trying to find somewhere to live. OK?

25. What is your relationship status?  single (not in a relationship)  
 in relationship but not living together  
 married / defacto (living together)
26. Do you have children?  Yes  No  
If yes: Female  ages .....  
Male  ages .....
27. Did your children live with you before you last went into prison?  
 Yes  No
28. Are your children living with you now?  
 Yes  No
29. What barriers or *difficulties* have you faced in being able to have your children live with you since the last time you came out of prison?
30. If you are living with a partner and/or with children, did they move to the area you are now living to be with you?  
 Yes  No
31. Is there anything else you want to say before we finish up?



## Report part four: conclusions and recommendations

### Overall conclusions

#### Ex-prisoners face multiple social disadvantages

The existing literature and the research undertaken for this project clearly show that the ex-prisoner population suffers from multiple social disadvantages and that these disadvantages can have compounding effects. The literature clearly shows too that the homeless population also experiences significant social disadvantage. What emerges from the current paper is that, in terms of social disadvantage, the homeless population and the prisoner and ex-prisoner populations exhibit many of the same disadvantaged characteristics as each other. This suggests that the pathways into homelessness and pathways into imprisonment not only frequently run in parallel but also frequently intersect and converge.

The experience of homelessness can exacerbate existing deficits in areas such as employment and can contribute to the development or worsening of mental health problems and physical ill-health. Homeless people may face discrimination when seeking accommodation or employment. Being homeless can negatively impact on family and other relationships and lead to a person becoming socially isolated.

Not only do ex-prisoners share many of the disadvantage characteristics of the homeless population, they frequently have these to a greater extent than the homeless population. The experience of imprisonment can have very similar effects to the experience of homelessness. Ex-prisoners face stigmatisation and discrimination in relation to finding accommodation and employment. Compared to people who may be homeless but not have an offending history, ex-prisoners may encounter more negative responses from landlords, real estate agents, employers or others approached for assistance. While a non-offending homeless person may be seen by a landlord or employer as 'down on their luck' and deserving assistance, the ex-prisoner is more likely to be seen as the agent of their own fate, not deserving of help or trust, and possibly as a threat. The effects of this discrimination can have negative impacts in terms of depression and loss of self-esteem and in some cases may contribute to re-offending. Many ex-prisoners feel in any case they are somehow separate from the rest of society, even without having this 'proven' to them through discrimination.

Spending time in prison can be a traumatising experience for many people and the stresses of life in prison can contribute to the development of psychiatric and psychological difficulties. A person's offending behaviour and imprisonment can have negative impacts for families, partners and friends and can contribute to family breakdown.

While in prison, a person is likely to encounter violence and may themselves become a victim or have to adopt violent behaviours as a survival mechanism. Prisoners live in conditions that can create deficits in basic living skills, affect their capacity to make decisions or cope with difficult situations and reduce their ability to interact

in socially appropriate ways. Institutionalisation can arise as a set of responses and behaviours that are conducive to prison life but can be counter-productive to life in the community. Being in prison can expose a person to physiological health problems such as infectious diseases or exacerbate existing conditions.

An individual who is both an ex-prisoner and is homeless, or has experienced both, is likely to face cumulative disadvantages with the negative effects of imprisonment and homelessness compounding each other. Where such a person has deficits not only in areas such as employment and education, but also has psychiatric, intellectual or physical disability, or substance abuse problems or the results of institutionalisation, they are likely to find themselves amongst the most disadvantaged members of our society.

### The social disadvantages faced by ex-prisoners are of a kind that leaves them vulnerable to homelessness

The close concordance between types of social disadvantage seen in the homeless population and those seen in the ex-prisoner population suggests that at various points in time the two populations are likely to cross and merge, and this proves to be the case.

These same disadvantages can leave ex-prisoners particularly vulnerable to homelessness. An individual may have come to prison from an unsuitable accommodation situation, or may have had suitable accommodation which is lost while in prison. Needless to say, society continues to move along while a person is removed from it and isolated in prison. An individual's home, job, family and friends may all be lost to them while they are in custody.

On release from prison, many people will still have family or friends they can turn to, or they may have been able to retain their housing. Many others will leave prison with nowhere to go to. All face returning to a society and community from which they have been separated, to which they may have never been fully attached even before prison, and which may have changed while they have been away. All face having to adapt to a world and a way of living that are very different from what they experienced in prison, where the rules are not the same, where daily living requires making decisions and exercising responsibilities which may have become completely foreign and where the kinds of behaviours that ensure success and survival inside lead to conflict and rejection outside.

Those individuals who leave prison without somewhere to go face the prospect of trying to find a decent place to live despite having barely enough money for rent in a cheap private hotel or boarding house. Having set up in such a residence, the ex-prisoner may well find that the living conditions are not much better than they experienced in prison, and they may be surrounded by stresses, pressures and temptations that are more conducive to drug-use and offending than they are to the difficult task of settling into society.

More than likely the ex-prisoner will not be able to afford to rent a house or unit — even if they could find an affordable one — and will not have enough money for bond, rent in advance or to having the electricity, gas and telephone connected. Even with enough money, the ex-prisoner faces an uphill battle trying to convince a landlord

or real estate agent they are a good tenancy prospect, against a background that likely includes no rental history or a poor history, no rental references and where the individual's last address was prison. The individual may even have been 'blacklisted' as a bad tenant, whether or not this is warranted.

Chances are the ex-prisoner will face the same kinds of problems trying to get a job. On top of the stigmatisation and discrimination, the individual may not have any good working experience to draw on, may be lacking in job-ready skills and may have had limited education and no qualifications. Without a stable home the ex-prisoner may face problems making contact with employers and presenting appropriately for interviews. Not having a job makes it that much harder to get a home; not having a home makes it that much harder to get a job.

Those who do leave prison with somewhere to go are not always better off. Many people will leave prison and stay with family or friends, but these arrangements often do not last and the ex-prisoner may soon find they have lost both their home and their support.

Faced with having no proper home, no job, no support and suffering under the strains of trying to settle into the community while possibly dealing with mental illness, intellectual disability, poor health or any number of other problems, many ex-prisoners will look to find a comfort zone within this turmoil. This may mean returning to a familiar place, perhaps where they previously lived and where old friends are. This may be the same place where the person's offending behaviour took place and the old friends may be the same old friends who helped lead the ex-prisoner into offending, maybe into drug use. A return to familiar places and associations may also mean a return to familiar behaviours. In other cases the ex-prisoner's comfort zone may be directly in the realm of drug or alcohol abuse, or abuse may simply be a way of coping. Drug and alcohol abuse and offending behaviour, or simply wasting limited income on 'partying', are not conducive to establishing stable and secure accommodation or establishing an ordered life. For a significant number of ex-prisoners drug and alcohol abuse are a direct contributor to homelessness and re-offending.

### Homelessness makes a person vulnerable to imprisonment, or re-imprisonment

Homeless people are arrested and incarcerated at a rate that far exceeds the domiciled population. Being homeless exposes a person to a heightened risk of offending, through peer pressure, temptation or necessity. Certainly not all homeless people commit offences, but on occasions some homeless people will offend merely to survive, for food or the money to buy a roof over their head.

This problem may be even worse for ex-prisoners. The disadvantages faced by ex-prisoners are of a kind that leaves them at a heightened risk of being re-imprisoned. The cumulative effects of financial strains, social isolation and disempowerment, together with poor social interaction skills and possibly substance abuse can place people in situations where they may be tempted or pressured to offend. Having offended, been caught and incarcerated can in some cases have a labelling effect which further heightens the risk.

A number of ex-prisoners interviewed for this study spoke of offending for survival and some spoke of offending for the sole purpose of being arrested and returned to prison. For these individuals, their homelessness and the strains that came with it were such that being in prison presented a far better option than trying to survive outside.

It is surely a condemnation of our response to both post-release integration with the community, and addressing the problems of homelessness, that wilful abuse of the law becomes a person's only perceived means of accessing safe and secure accommodation.

The literature review (Part 1) and the interviews with SAAP service providers and ex-prisoner clients (Parts 2 and 3) in the current study make it apparent that stable and secure housing are vital to an ex-prisoner's prospects of a successful return to the community. It has been consistently shown that ex-prisoners who do not experience significant post-release accommodation problems are more likely to be able to adopt a lifestyle that is free of offending behaviour and substance abuse and are relatively unlikely to return to prison. There can be no doubt that housing is a fundamental determinant of post-release success.

### The homelessness experiences of ex-prisoners are essentially consistent across time and place

One particularly notable aspect of this study has been the close concordance between what the literature says ex-prisoners experience and what the ex-prisoner clients, and staff, of SAAP-funded agencies say they experience. In one sense this is not surprising, nor is it particularly revealing. Assuming each of the studies has had a reasonable amount of validity this should be the case.

The information gained from the qualitative interviews done for this study is useful though because it not only confirms what the literature says, but it places it in a local and contemporary context. In doing so it adds to the relatively small body of literature that addresses Australian ex-prisoners and their accommodation problems.

What is particularly interesting too is how much similarity there is between, for example, the problems faced by ex-prisoners in studies done in the United Kingdom in the 1970s, and the problems faced by ex-prisoners in Australia at the end of 2003. Times and society may have changed and many research studies and policy developments may have come and gone, but overall ex-prisoners do not seem any better off today than they did 30 years ago.

### The private housing profile has changed in ways that make it harder for people to avoid homelessness

One reason why the circumstances of released prisoners may not have improved is that any gains made through better correctional programs or efforts in the welfare and accommodation sectors may have been off-set by external changes in the societal environment.

Perhaps the most significant change affecting the accommodation prospects of ex-prisoners and others has been rising property values, particularly in inner-city and neighbouring areas. This has affected the lower-end, cheap and affordable private

hotels and boarding houses that have often been the only resort of those on very limited incomes. Rising property values in recent times have seen the sites of much of the affordable accommodation redeveloped, often to make way for commercial or high-end residential properties. In other cases the establishment itself has been renovated and refurbished, usually moving it into much higher cost brackets.

Often this redevelopment is the result of 'gentrification' where either through market forces or deliberate local government planning the character of inner urban areas has been changed, moving them from areas predominantly consisting of light industry and other commercial premises or older housing stock into up-market residential and commercial properties. Where these changes are occurring due to state or local government planning, one cannot exclude the possibility that conscious efforts are being made to move homeless people away from inner-city areas as a way of improving the city's appearance to enhance tourism and other commercial input.

The phenomenon of changed urban use and development profiles is being observed not only in capital cities but also in regional areas. In the one regional area covered in parts two and three of this study, the profile of the town was being gradually altered and an area adjacent to the city centre which once held many cheap boarding houses now consists of new residential housing, some of it in the multi-million dollar bracket.

There has tended to be an accumulation of these establishments in inner-city areas and there tends to be an accumulation of homeless people and often of support agencies in these same areas. Whether the affordable accommodation arose in inner-city areas because of the accumulation of prospective residents in these areas, or whether the converse is true, many of the establishments have now gone from these areas. The people needing them remain nonetheless.

Rising property values in most areas throughout recent years has led to a significant increase in median house prices, making home ownership impossible for many people. At the time of writing, a number of media sources were reporting that the median housing price in Sydney had risen to \$500,000. Clearly a sizeable proportion of the community cannot afford to accrue the deposit and costs involved in such a purpose or secure and maintain a mortgage of the size necessary to buy into this market. The segment of the community that is gradually becoming alienated from home ownership includes many people who have never been to prison, have never had a problem with employment or accommodation and do not suffer mental illness, disabilities, substance abuse problems, poor education, family breakdown, discrimination or stigmatisation. Perhaps not surprisingly, very few ex-prisoner clients of SAAP agencies talk optimistically about buying their own home.

Leaving aside the dim prospect of home ownership, high property values, coupled with very low tenant-vacancy rates, have led to an increase in private rental prices, pushing them further out of the reach of those on limited incomes. Many ex-prisoners interviewed for the current study, and those in other Australian studies, see themselves as being permanently cut off from the private rental market.

## The public housing profile has changed in ways that make it harder for people to avoid homelessness

Homeless people are also being affected by another major change, which is a consequence of not only increased property values and changing urban profiles, but of changes in government policy and resource allocations. Many ex-prisoners and staff interviewed for this and other studies talk of decreases in public housing stock and how difficult it is for anyone, except those in exceptionally dire circumstances, to access public housing. With private housing becoming almost unattainable many people on low incomes are becoming reliant on public or community housing and are finding this more and more difficult to secure.

Agency staff find it increasingly difficult to access exit points for their clients and often attribute this to a decreasing public housing stock. It is apparent from various sources that some state governments are reducing their housing stock. In some cases this is because they need the revenue from property sales to fund their core business, or because they do not have the money to maintain ageing stock. In both circumstances increased property values may be a major contributor to these decisions, along with changes in government funding and policy directions. Moves to replace the provision of public housing with greater access to rent assistance do not necessarily help those in positions of housing difficulty who are not in a position to rent even with financial assistance.

Certainly public housing is not ideal in many respects and some public housing areas are beset with problems like drug and alcohol misuse and may have very high crime rates. At the same time, studies show that public housing can engender a strong sense of community among residents. Within the present study, many ex-prisoners see public housing not just as their only real housing goal, but also as a desirable outcome for themselves. The evidence suggests that those able to access long-term public housing have good prospects for remaining in the community, free from re-offending and imprisonment.

There are positive signs that developments in community housing are off-setting public housing reductions in some areas, but the extent of growth in the community housing area is not known. It may be that an appreciation of this growth has been assessed, but investigating that question is beyond the scope of this study. There is room for a much clearer picture of the present and future state of community housing to be developed, if it has not been, and for this to be used to inform the future of housing availability for those on low incomes.

## Ex-prisoners need housing that is appropriate in type and location

Ex-prisoners' offending history and associations may make it difficult or inappropriate to house them in certain locations and areas. Research shows that the ex-prisoner population typically comes from, and usually returns to, a relatively small number of areas. These are areas typically marked by very high levels of socio-economic disadvantage. Returning to these areas and communities is likely to bring ex-prisoners into contact with the same kinds of problems that may have contributed to their offending before. It can be very hard for someone to make positive changes in their life within such an environment.

It is clear from the literature and the interviews done for this study that a return to 'old haunts' and contact with past friends and acquaintances can be a major risk factor for re-offending or substance abuse. During the interviews many ex-prisoners talked of the likelihood or actuality of them re-offending once they went back to certain areas and began associating with old friends. Some ex-prisoners who were trying to make a success of their return to the community were adamant about not getting caught by the past in this way and some were very anxious about having to move back to areas they had lived in before.

While for all homeless people past associations can have negative consequences, this appears to be heightened in the case of ex-prisoners, given their previous involvement in offending, and can present a major challenge for accommodation providers. This is particularly so in regional areas where accommodation options may be more limited. Agencies need to be mindful of these problems when trying to access accommodation and need to be sensitive to the wishes of clients in this regard. Given limited accommodation options in any case, having to avoid moving clients to certain areas will not make the task of service provision any easier.

### Stable and secure housing is vital to a successful return to the community for many ex-prisoners

Having a home is critical if many ex-prisoners are going to have any real prospect of successfully returning to the community. Research conducted both in Australia and overseas, including the study incorporated into this report, show that having access to appropriate accommodation can provide the platform which allows ex-prisoners to begin making the changes and adaptations necessary for adjusting to life in the general community. Research shows that those with stable and secure housing have lower rates of re-offending and re-incarceration than those who experience homelessness or accommodation difficulties. SAAP agency clients interviewed for the current study told of their previous failures to change their lives and how housing, and support, were now letting them put the past behind them and work towards the future.

Without appropriate housing a person's ability to find employment, access assistance and services, address substance abuse issues or other aspects of offending behaviour, maintain self-esteem and start to think of him or herself as a 'normal' member of society can be severely undermined. Without appropriate housing it can be almost impossible for some ex-prisoners to begin putting order into lives characterised by chaos. Stable housing, the research shows, engenders more stable lives. This stability is likely to contribute to a reduction in recidivism, which can in turn provide multiple benefits to society.

### Support is critical

Certainly not all ex-prisoners will become homeless, nor will they all re-offend. Many are able to get on successfully with their return to the community. They may achieve this with or without support, but having good and appropriate support emerges clearly from this study as absolutely vital to a successful return to the community for many ex-prisoners. Good and appropriate support can be the linchpin that makes housing attainable and lets positive change take place.

One aspect of good and appropriate support in the current context is support that is available at the point of release from prison. The first days and weeks — possibly even the first hours — after release are critical. Even a very short period without support can lead to some ex-prisoners falling into behaviours or associations that can impair their prospects of a successful return to the community. One day of ‘partying’ or spent living on the streets can undermine all positive intentions the ex-prisoner may have had. While support will not guarantee that these problems will be averted, having a place to stay and professional guidance to steer an individual’s decisions can make a fundamental difference.

To be able to have support in place at the point of release support services, including supported accommodation agencies, need to be able to work with potential clients some time before release. Accessing serving prisoners allows the agency to establish trust and rapport, make assessments of the client’s wants and needs and begin to make sure support resources such as beds and workers are available. From the prisoner’s perspective establishing contact before release provides confidence and a measure of surety that offers of assistance are genuine and they have something to go to when released. This allows the prisoner to begin planning and preparing for release and approach their return to the community with more optimism and less trepidation.

For relevant agencies to be able to provide in-prison support they need to have adequate resources to meet assessed needs, in the form of trained staff and infrastructure such as accommodation beds. Agencies will need to have access to funding that provides for these kinds of resources.

In the present context, good and appropriate support also means support that is tailored to the individual’s needs and which demonstrates an understanding and appreciation of the individual’s circumstances and how they got there. It means recognising that a person may face particular difficulties through having been in prison, that these may make the person hard to work with, and understanding the importance of not condemning the person for this. It means support that is available when it is needed, particularly in the first days and weeks, even the first hours, after a person is released from prison. It means knowing what the individual client needs and being able to provide it through a range of flexible options that reflect changing and developing circumstances.

Many clients in the current survey felt there was much to be gained from ex-prisoners providing advice and assistance to other ex-prisoners on a peer support basis. This suggests that there is a strong potential for positive results to be obtained from funding to assist the development of ex-prisoner support services utilising a peer support model. At the same time, it is clear that those agencies who participated in this study and who are providing intensive support targeted at ex-prisoners are achieving very positive outcomes for many individual clients. This leads to the conclusion that the most important component of the worker-client relationship for ex-prisoners is not necessarily shared experience, but shared understanding and a shared appreciation of experiences and needs.



Good support is not restricted to support provided by community agencies. Many ex-prisoners receive support and assistance from their families, including the direct provision of accommodation. Ex-prisoners who have support from family, as well as friends and intimate partners, have better prospects for a successful return to the community than those who have lost or become alienated from these personal supports. Even where an ex-prisoner needs support with some aspects of their lives, personal support can make it more likely that professional support will have positive effects.

It is genuinely unfortunate that, for some prisoners and ex-prisoners, the strain placed on families through offending behaviour and imprisonment can lead to family support being withdrawn. For others, who may have come from abusive or dysfunctional childhood experiences, positive family support may have never been available. Given the relationship between family support and a relative likelihood of freedom from both re-offending and homelessness, any interventions that correctional agencies, SAAP agencies or others can make to help prisoners and ex-prisoners maintain or repair family relationships stand to produce multiple benefits.

### Addressing problems of homelessness in ex-prisoners requires special interventions

One theme that emerges from the present study and those before is that ex-prisoners with accommodation problems have needs that separate them in some ways from others with accommodation problems. As discussed, ex-prisoners have multiple and perhaps compounding levels of disadvantage. The effects of institutionalisation may make them difficult to work with, perhaps overly hostile and manipulative or subservient and easily exploited. Responding to these needs requires special skills and perhaps special training, and risks negative reactions from others, including other clients, who may see any support given to ex-prisoners as being unwarranted and undeserved. For an agency that provides accommodation, having ex-prisoner clients may impact on resources because many people do not want to share a home with ex-prisoners, including other ex-prisoners.

It had been hoped at the outset of this project that the present study would provide some insight into whether ex-prisoner clients have a greater impact on service providers than other clients, and whether assisting ex-prisoners took away from the ability to provide services to others. Such insight was not able to be gained from this study, mainly because of the profile of the agencies that participated. These were agencies who for the most part targeted ex-prisoners and in any case saw ex-prisoner clients as deserving at least the same level of services as others. While staff talked of some impacts, and some of the ways working with ex-prisoners was difficult, none of them saw that this detracted from their service provision. For some agencies these difficulties were at the very core of their service.

It is possible (and indeed likely) that other agencies, especially those not targeting ex-prisoners, are experiencing greater impacts and there is still a need to explore this question with a larger and more broadly representative sample of SAAP agencies. Further examination will be hampered by the make-up of SAAP administrative data,

which does not allow ex-prisoner clients to be easily identified within the broader client population. Currently the only question in the administrative data which comes close to identifying ex-prisoner clients is the question about where clients were living immediately prior to attending the SAAP agency. This question:

- (a) does not address whether clients have ever been in prison, and
- (b) does not necessarily mean that a client will indicate that their last place of residence was prison if indeed it was, due to the possibility that some clients may not wish to identify themselves as ex-prisoners.

The fact that many ex-prisoners do not experience accommodation problems until some time after release, and the reluctance of many ex-prisoners to disclose their history unless they have to, means that the ability to identify SAAP agency clients (i.e. proportions of ex-prisoner versus other types of client) from administrative data is greatly hampered.

### Addressing problems of homelessness in ex-prisoners requires collaborative relationships that must include correctional services

One of the fundamental difficulties with undertaking interventions for prisoners and ex-prisoners is the question of where responsibilities fall. Housing assistance for people being released from prison does not fall neatly within the responsibility of any particular government agency or sector. Serving prisoners are the responsibility of state and territory correctional services and agencies responsible for housing and welfare services do not exercise any particular responsibility for them. Once released, unless an ex-prisoner is still serving a sentence under parole supervision, they are no longer the responsibility of corrective services. Even parole supervision may be the responsibility of an agency separate from corrective services. Planning post-release housing and support, and managing the transition from prison to the community can be impossible unless responsibilities can bridge the gap between pre-release and post-release.

Corrective services security considerations can also make it difficult for prisoners to access outside agencies, and for outside agencies to access prisoners. Prisoners are necessarily restricted from contact with the outside community in many ways, including strict limits on telephone calls and visits. Correctional institutions must place very tight restrictions on who is able to enter the institutions and for what purpose. Overall, to a large extent the role of corrective services is focused on maintaining safe and secure custody and duty of care considerations arising from that. Corrective services resources must always be very carefully targeted with the appropriate balance struck between 'maintenance' costs such as security and infrastructure and 'intervention' costs such as programs and education.

In the face of this, it can be very difficult for other government agencies or outside service providers to make contact with serving prisoners and begin providing meaningful support to them. It can also be difficult for those outside to gain an understanding of an individual prisoner's needs and issues, and practical considerations such as when a prisoner is due for release, without cooperation and assistance from correctional staff.

Policy development in the area of homelessness increasingly relies on collaborative arrangements and partnerships between government and community agencies. It is vital that corrective services be fundamentally involved in any policy development aimed at addressing homelessness among ex-prisoners. Given the relationship between homelessness, offending and re-incarceration, corrective services should be considered a key stakeholder in most aspects of homelessness policy. Involving corrective services will help to balance security and access needs and will allow policy development to be informed by a greater understanding of the particular needs of ex-prisoners and the particular issues they face. There will always be a difficulty for SAAP given that the Commonwealth does not have any responsibility for operational corrections, but involving state and territory correctional agencies at the right point of the policy development cycle should help to overcome this.

During interviews with ex-prisoner clients many spoke of the important role that parole or community corrections officers played in helping them re-establish in the community. Community corrections officers sometimes carry a difficult role, having to balance compliance with behavioural management support and welfare-type support. The very important role they can play in helping ex-prisoners avoid post-release homelessness, with other aspects of a successful return to the community, needs to be recognised. There is some scope for greater collaboration between those in the housing sector and those in corrective services to more explicitly integrate the part played by community corrections officers with the roles of others involved in addressing ex-prisoner homelessness. These would need to be done in a way that does not compromise the compliance and supervision aspects of the community corrections officer's role.

### Interventions to address homelessness in ex-prisoners must begin at the point of reception into prison

Adopting a throughcare approach, a prisoner's post-release accommodation should begin to be addressed from the time they are received into the prison.

Research has identified certain categories of prisoners who are most likely to experience post-release homelessness, including:

- ▶ those experiencing accommodation problems before incarceration;
- ▶ those with substance abuse or mental health problems;
- ▶ those in public or private rented accommodation before incarceration who are likely to lose their tenancy whilst incarcerated;
- ▶ those without adequate social or family supports;
- ▶ women, especially with dependent children; and
- ▶ Indigenous people, especially women.

During the process of induction and classification an assessment should be made of the likelihood the prisoner will experience accommodation difficulties after release. The initial assessment process should consider the prisoner's accommodation history and whether interventions need to be made to retain existing accommodation, assist the prisoner to resolve problems such as rent arrears or ensure the person

can stay on public housing waiting lists. The assessment should also consider other issues potentially impacting on housing, such as family situation, employment prospects, behavioural or life skills issues and disabilities that may generate special housing needs. Jurisdictions may have to develop or adopt a specialist assessment tool, or modify existing tools, to gather this information. There may a role for the Commonwealth, through SAAP, in assisting with the development of standard assessment tools for homelessness.

Assessments made at the point of reception should then flow-through to forms of support such as case management, welfare and education within the prison, and be used to facilitate contact with outside agencies.

Selected corrective services staff involved in the induction and classification process should be trained in identifying prisoners who are relatively likely to face accommodation problems on their release. This will include prisoners who do not necessarily fall into one of the above categories but whose circumstances are likely to result in post-release homelessness. Information management systems within the correctional system must be able to support this identification process.

Welfare and other appropriate staff within the correctional system should begin putting in place interventions for these prisoners from the time they are received into the system. The nature of the intervention will depend on the individual prisoner's circumstances and the length of their sentence (or anticipated length of their remand period) but possible interventions may include:

- ▶ assisting the prisoner to work with the relevant housing agency to find ways to maintain the tenancy, address existing rental debts, avoid further accumulation of debts and access public housing waiting lists;
- ▶ assist the prisoner to access family, friends or agencies who can store or otherwise secure their personal possessions;
- ▶ identify programs or treatment available with the prison system and post-release to address issues such substance abuse, mental health or offending behaviour;
- ▶ identify programs or courses to build the person's capacity to secure and maintain accommodation by developing skills in areas such as living and coping skills, vocational training, literacy and numeracy skills;
- ▶ establish avenues of contact between the prisoner and outside agencies who can provide pre-release assessment, advice or other assistance and post-release support;
- ▶ establish contacts with departments such as Centrelink to ensure at the time of release the prisoner will have adequate identification and arrangements in place to immediately secure social security and other benefits;
- ▶ assist the prisoner to draw on and where necessary mend relationships with family members or friends;
- ▶ assist the prisoner to work with family and appropriate friends who can provide suitable accommodation on release, even if this is only an interim arrangement until longer-term accommodation can be arranged; and

- ▶ assist the prisoner to establish relationships with others in the prison system who can provide them with appropriate advice and assistance such as peer supports and case managers.

### Those in prison for a short time may be worse off than those staying longer

A theme strongly emerging from the literature, from interviews with staff of SAAP agencies and from interviews with ex-prisoner clients is that people who spend relatively short periods of time in prison, whether on remand or serving short sentences, may have worse post-release outcomes than those serving longer sentences. For the most part this also applies to those who may have served medium-length sentences but have been released with no post-release supervision.

A very significant proportion of prisoners serve sentences of 12 months or less, many of these serving less than six months or even less than three months. People held on remand may be in custody for several months and then released, usually because they are acquitted or because they are convicted and released with time in remand adjudged to be time served off their sentence. During the period from arrest to release many prisoners will lose any stable housing they had before being incarcerated. Caught up in the process of arrest, incarceration and court appearances, many people will not be able to put arrangements in place to secure their home or possessions. They will usually not be able to maintain rent payments and may be evicted. Their property may be confiscated or stolen. While it may have been possible for those in public housing to make arrangements to maintain their tenancy, many prisoners will not be aware of this or not know how to put these arrangements in place.

Many prisoners will experience a breakdown of relationships with family, friends and perhaps intimate partners during a short period in custody. They may lose the support and trust of families. Friends may turn away from them. Partners may find the strain of coping too much. In some cases relationship breakdowns may mean that previous or possible future accommodation may no longer be offered. In other cases, partners or relatives may not be able to sustain housing that had previously been shared with the prisoner, and accommodation may be lost in this way.

Those held in prison for longer terms will experience the same problems, often to a greater degree. The difference is that those held for longer are much more likely to be able to access forms of support and assistance that short-term prisoners are simply unable to access. Those released after longer periods will usually be able to access programs, information and other assistance during their imprisonment. They may even be able to take part in dedicated pre-release programs and be able to secure support from external agencies before release. Those serving longer periods will usually be released on parole, under supervision, and having stable and secure accommodation pre-arranged will be a condition of that parole.

People serving short sentences or those held on remand often are not able to access programs, whether they be education, behaviour management or those assisting with post-release issues. Prisoners may have to wait for a long time to access programs and those serving longer periods may be given priority or deemed more deserving or

needy. Prison routines only allow limited time to take part in programs or see welfare staff. Remandees may be released from court without any plans or arrangements in place, as may sentenced prisoners released without parole supervision. Neither group is likely to have received much assistance with addressing the behaviour or circumstances that led to them being in custody.

There would seem to be scope for the development of programs tailored to the post-release needs of short-term prisoners. These would aim to help prisoners access forms of support and avoid returning to the kinds of behaviour that perhaps led to them being imprisoned. Programs would need to assist released prisoners to adjust quickly from being a prisoner to being a member of the community, and would assist the ex-prisoner to cope with breakdowns in family and other relationships. As it could be difficult to provide such a program within existing prison routines, a dedicated period of time may need to be established just before release to provide such a program. Additional resources would also be needed, particularly taking into account the very high numbers of prisoners being released on a continuing basis. The difficulties of altering prison routines, establishing the necessary assessment processes and allocating the very substantial resources needed cannot be underestimated. At the same time, these difficulties must be balanced with the problems raised by so many prisoners re-offending and returning to imprisonment and with the benefits to be gained from reducing this level of recidivism.

If establishing programmatic support for prisoners serving short sentences is difficult, doing the same for those on remand is even harder, though just as necessary. Prisoners on remand have not been tried or convicted and must be treated as innocent. It is very difficult to plan interventions for remandees as it cannot be known with any certainty how long they will be held or whether they will be convicted or sentenced.

Given the many difficulties encountered with providing programmatic support, the development of more passive forms of assistance, such as printed information, may be more appropriate. There might be a need for this to be produced in audio form for prisoners without literacy skills.

### **We need to know more before we can tackle some of the major problem areas**

The literature and the present study allow us a good understanding of some aspects of ex-prisoner homelessness, but there is still a need for more work to be undertaken to yield a clearer understanding of some aspects of the issue.

#### **Ex-prisoners' use of SAAP services**

A key knowledge area, which can potentially degrade any efforts to improve the provision of SAAP services to ex-prisoners, is that SAAP data does not allow for a clear assessment of how many ex-prisoners are accessing SAAP services.

As discussed in Part one, only a proportion of prisoners who seek SAAP services do so immediately after leaving prison. Many have other accommodation available for a time, through family, friends or independently. An ex-prisoner may have accommodation straight after prison but lose it, perhaps because of arguments with parents over problems the person is facing trying to cope with being back in the

community. As a SAAP client, this person may report their parent's home as their last residence and identify the family problems or perhaps substance abuse problems as their reason for seeking assistance. This will obscure the fact that the essence of the problem is the client's imprisonment and offending history.

We still do not know much about the way in which ex-prisoners make use of SAAP services and whether the special difficulties and needs that ex-prisoners bring are impacting on SAAP services.

To address these issues properly, two research questions can be identified:

- (1) What proportion of all ex-prisoners make use of SAAP services?
- (2) What proportion of all SAAP agency clients are ex-prisoners?

These are two separate research questions. The first asks about the percentage of post-release prisoners that turn to SAAP services for assistance. Answering this question would provide valuable information about anticipated levels of usage by ex-prisoners. On the basis that a particular number of prisoners are released each year (and particular information about risk factors for homelessness), estimates of demand for SAAP services could be gauged which would allow the SAAP sector to prepare for this demand. Answering this question, however, would require interviewing prisoners about their intentions prior to release from prison (or very shortly afterward if possible) as it becomes very difficult to track prisoners upon release from prison.

The second question asks about the percentage of all SAAP agency clients who are ex-prisoners. It is not possible to determine this percentage from the SAAP administrative data, hence, answering this question would either require this information to be somehow collected in future collections, or require that a representative sample of SAAP agencies are interviewed about their ex-prisoner clients in comparison with other types of client. If the sample of agencies were truly representative, including on the basis of regional distributions, an estimate of the proportion of clients at a national level who are post-release could be calculated. The benefit of being able to answer this question is that the SAAP sector would then have a good idea of the level of demand for their services which is directed toward ex-prisoner clients (and any special/additional needs associated with this demand).

In the current study neither of these questions was able to be addressed, due to both time and resource constraints. The above questions essentially each comprise much larger projects than that able to be undertaken in this study. These constraints in large part determined the methodology used in this study in relation to the interviews with stakeholders and ex-prisoner clients. The profile of the participating agencies was such that these agencies primarily targeted ex-prisoner clients. Hence the impact that this client group has on other client groups was not really relevant to these agencies. While there were clients interviewed who were not receiving intensive, individualised support, they also were not able to clearly inform this question. It seemed that many of those interviewed had never given much consideration to which agencies they were getting assistance from and would make use of services when and where they needed them to address specific needs. Most did not exhibit

clear patterns of use, or did not indicate enough recollection to allow these patterns to be discerned.

The need to gather this information remains as greater information about ex-prisoners' use of SAAP would have clear benefits from an information and research point of view, and could lead to service improvements. Being able, for instance, to ask a client whether they have served time in prison in the last six months or whether their need for SAAP assistance was in any way related to having served time in custody, may lead to the provision of more targeted and individualised assistance.

There also remains a need for ex-prisoners' use of SAAP services to be further investigated through a wider group of agencies and clients. A broader sample of agencies would likely pick up more agencies who are not focused on ex-prisoners and a wider range of service delivery models. A broader sample of clients would also pick up clients who are not ex-prisoners and may have perceptions of whether ex-prisoners are impacting on services. In either case the research will be hampered by SAAP data not clearly indicating whether clients are ex-prisoners. Often the agencies themselves will not be aware of their clients' status as many ex-prisoners will not identify as such if they do not need to, and asking them to identify their status may be a breach of privacy and a barrier to maintaining good agency-client relations. These problems may possibly be overcome if collection of the information can be shown to lead directly to better service outcomes for the individuals providing the information.

Against these difficulties, a question must be asked as to whether ex-prisoner clients are entitled to equal access to SAAP services as any other client group. If it is accepted that ex-prisoners are entitled to equal access to SAAP services and that the individual's present needs are more important than whether they have a criminal history, then it can be argued that the question of whether ex-prisoners have greater impact on SAAP services per se is moot. This is a question for policymakers as it underpins the rationale for where future research should be directed. If it is determined and agreed that SAAP services should be equally available and accessible to ex-prisoner clients as to any other type of client then the important question becomes whether a given individual has a higher level of need than another given individual and whether the agency is equipped to meet those needs. This question would then be informed by determining how the needs of ex-prisoner SAAP clients differ from other types of SAAP client.

### **Indigenous post-release homelessness**

We still know relatively little about homelessness from an Indigenous perspective. As discussed in Part one of the report, the notion of 'homelessness' may be very different for an Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander person than it is for others in the community. Understanding more about how Indigenous people experience homelessness is vital if their needs are to be properly met. Without this understanding it will be hard for the Indigenous community to express its needs and for SAAP agencies to know how to address them, or be able to evaluate whether services provided are helping. A greater understanding of Indigenous homelessness is important given the large overrepresentation of Indigenous people in the SAAP client group.



Indigenous people are also greatly overrepresented in the prisoner and ex-prisoner population and little is known about the post-release experiences of Indigenous people. The relatively little research that has been conducted in Australia shows that Indigenous ex-prisoners, particularly females, experience serious problems with maintaining accommodation post-release and are highly vulnerable to re-incarceration. A closer examination needs to be made of the Indigenous post-release experience, especially in relation to accommodation.

This, however, is not a simple task and any attempt to research Indigenous post-release experiences must be undertaken sensitively and appropriately. Language and cultural issues must be given full consideration in the design of the research. The methodology to be used in the research will depend very much on the prior consideration given to these issues, as well as perceived accessibility to clients and potential obstacles. One possibility might be to interview Indigenous SAAP service providers in the first instance, both to gain some insight into the experiences and needs of Indigenous clients and also to provide feedback about any proposed research methodology for interviewing Indigenous clients.

#### **Post-release domestic violence and links to homelessness**

Domestic violence is a major cause of homelessness for many women and children. A majority of homeless women are likely to have experienced domestic violence and there is anecdotal evidence to suggest that some men may leave prison with a heightened propensity for domestic violence. If this anecdotal evidence is valid, it may be that ex-prisoners in some circumstances may contribute to an increased risk of homelessness, including cyclical homelessness, for others. More research is needed to understand rates of domestic violence among ex-prisoners and whether pre- or post-release interventions can be used to reduce levels of violence, and possibly resulting homelessness.

#### **How best to address ex-prisoners' needs**

The literature and current study suggests that ex-prisoners do have special needs that may be better served if staff have special training or education to meet those needs. A closer examination of the nature of ex-prisoner needs and what is required to address them is needed. This would need to come from a welfare-education perspective focusing on service delivery skills, intervention models and perhaps adult education techniques. The examination should be informed by the knowledge of ex-prisoners' needs given throughout this report, particularly the best practice suggestions given in Section 7, Part 1.

#### **Regional/local differences**

The work of Baldry et al. has indicated that there are some major differences in post-release accommodation outcomes for prisoners released in New South Wales, compared to those in Victoria. Overseas studies have shown significant differences in homelessness experiences and outcomes in different cities. The current study included one regional centre and suggested there are some issues for ex-prisoners in that town that differ from issues in the capital cities, in substance if not in nature.

There is a need for more information to be gained about the post-release experiences of people in regional areas. A proportion of prisoners are released from prisons in regional areas and may remain in those areas or move to other regional areas, or prisoners released in capital cities may try to settle in regional areas. More needs to be known about how these movements affect post-release accommodation and how changes in housing and employment profiles or other community changes can impact on ex-prisoner accommodation. It may be that where an ex-prisoner's background lies and whether they remain in that area has some effect on outcomes. The issues that arise in relation to regional differences may also be applied to different local areas within the one region or capital. Certainly there are some areas that have greater socio-economic problems than others and a greater understanding of how these impact on post-release outcomes could provide valuable policy development information.

Knowledge around these issues may be best achieved by longitudinal studies that focus on prisoners released in different locations and takes into account their background and what services are available in different areas.

#### **Impact of current policy interventions**

As discussed in Part one, there are a number of promising developments taking place in Australian jurisdictions with the establishment and formulation of programs that seek to more effectively pursue a targeted and integrated approach to dealing with prisoner post-release outcomes. These developments could have positive impacts on the SAAP sector and could inform policy and program development. Those responsible for SAAP policy development should be aware of emerging programs and take careful note of the evaluations arising from them.

#### **Changes in public and community housing profiles**

While it appears that changes in public housing profiles may be impacting on ex-prisoner homelessness, particularly through a reduction in exit points from SAAP services, a closer investigation of this question was outside the scope of the current study. It may be that there are positive changes underway in public housing or that developments in community housing are off-setting some of the negative changes. Further examination of changes in public and community housing would provide information useful for policy development in this area.

## Recommendations

Arising from these conclusions, a number of recommendations or suggestions can be made.

1. The SAAP National Coordination and Development Committee (SAAP CAD) investigate ways to develop stronger partnerships with state and territory correctional services, perhaps through co-resourcing the development of:
  - ▶ assessment and classification procedures to identify risk of post-release homelessness, including the development of assessment tools;
  - ▶ programs and information to assist serving prisoners secure and maintain post-release accommodation;
  - ▶ means of assisting prisoners to retain public housing they may have had before incarceration, maintain their position on public housing waiting lists and resolve rental and other debts before release;
  - ▶ programs and information to assist serving prisoners maintain or repair family and other relationships, noting the importance of family support for positive post-release outcomes;
  - ▶ greater access for post-release agencies to provide information, assistance, assessment and related services to serving prisoners; and
  - ▶ improved networks between community corrections services and SAAP agencies.
2. The SAAP CAD consider ways SAAP data could better identify ex-prisoners among the SAAP client group.
3. The SAAP CAD develop understanding and knowledge by funding research to address key knowledge gaps, particularly in relation to:
  - ▶ Indigenous homelessness;
  - ▶ domestic violence perpetration among recently released ex-prisoners and its contribution to homelessness among intimate partners and children;
  - ▶ ex-prisoners' use of SAAP services;
  - ▶ service delivery practices or models that best address the special needs of ex-prisoners;
  - ▶ regional and local differences in post-release accommodation outcomes;
  - ▶ the impact of new corrections initiatives on post-release housing outcomes; and
  - ▶ how changes in public and community housing are impacting on ex-prisoner homelessness.

4. In the course of policy and program developments, that consideration be given by all parties to:
  - a. the application of SAAP funding to facilitate the establishment or further development of agencies targeting ex-prisoners and their families, including through the application of peer support models; and
  - b. how SAAP input could be used to counter decreasing exit points, perhaps through greater development of community housing options.
5. Investigations be made into the possibility of establishing management standards or a code of conduct for boarding-house type accommodation to reduce the impact of drug and alcohol use and other offending behaviour on recently released ex-prisoners residing in these premises.
6. Investigations be made into the possibility of establishing regulations or code of conduct standards for 'tenancy information services' which can have highly detrimental impacts on an ex-prisoner's ability to secure private rental accommodation.
7. In the course of policy and program development, that consideration be given by all parties to the feasibility of applying SAAP funding to the development of more transitional housing for recently released ex-prisoners, in the form of half-way houses, shared crisis and short-term housing or hostels and more independent and shared medium-term housing options.
8. Wherever possible and appropriate consultative input be sought from ex-prisoners and their representatives to inform SAAP decision making.