



Levelling the Playing Field

The Salvation Army Victoria State Budget Submission

2016-17



Levelling the Playing Field: The Salvation Army,
Victoria State Budget Submission 2016-17

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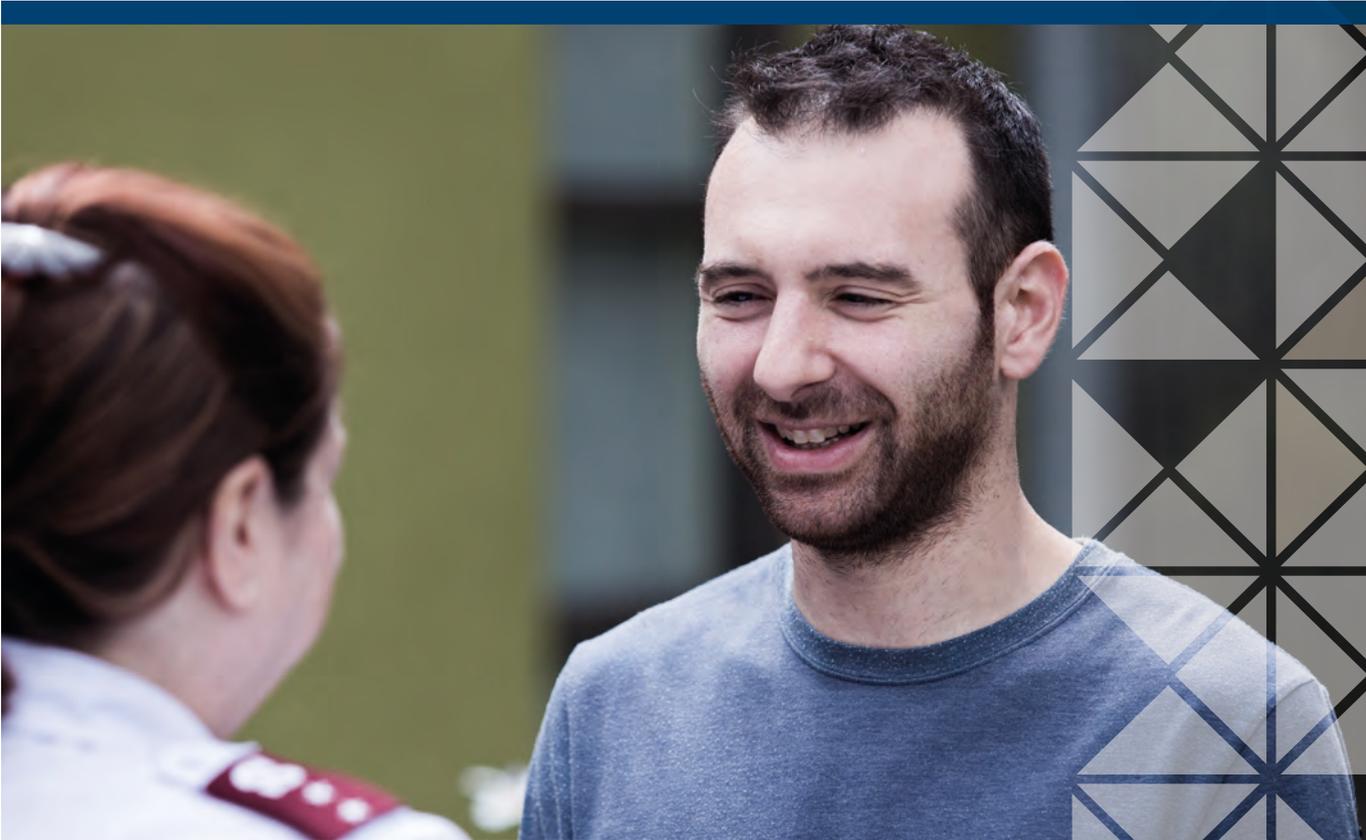
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About The Salvation Army

The Salvation Army is an international Christian movement with a presence in 126 countries and a reputation built on 150 years of compassionate care and advocacy. In Australia, the Salvos are widely known and relied upon to deliver practical responses to individuals, families and communities in crisis. Whilst we interact on a daily basis with people from all walks of life, we recognise a particular calling to those who might otherwise fall through the gaps of our social security nets, those who find themselves on the margins of our communities, and those who struggle to have their voices heard.

This support for disadvantaged Australians is driven by our values: human dignity, justice, hope, compassion and community. We share our community's belief in a 'fair go' for all, which grounds our commitment to social justice and a particular interest in the health and wellbeing of those most vulnerable in our society.

Levelling the Playing Field

This submission is based upon a series of consultations with Salvation Army services across Victoria held in the last months of 2015. Together they paint a picture of our state's most vulnerable and disadvantaged citizens—those in our community who face an 'un-level playing field.'

Today Salvation Army churches, community centres, and social service networks provide more than 350 distinct social program activities in urban, regional and rural areas across the state. These programmatic responses range from frontline emergency support services and targeted interventions, through to more generalist life stage responses.

Programs include:

- Youth, adult and aged homelessness and housing services;
- Family violence support and accommodation services;
- Material aid and emergency relief;
- Financial counselling and assistance, including Gamblers' Help;
- Personal counselling and support;
- Drug and alcohol support and treatment services;
- Youth services, including out-of-home care;
- Aged care services;
- Emergency disaster response and recovery services;
- Education, training and employment services;
- Chaplaincy and support services in courts and prisons;
- Services for refugees and asylum seekers; and
- Community mental health services.

This year, our consultations highlighted three groups of people that, without adequate supports, are likely to remain in entrenched disadvantage over the long term:

- Young people leaving state care;
- People exiting prison; and
- Highly marginalised people with complex needs.

This submission explores the specific needs and challenges facing each group, as well as pointing the way to achievable, practical solutions. The aim here is not to outline comprehensive, infallible program designs but rather to illustrate genuine options with sufficient evidence to prompt further investigation. Whilst these solutions come at a cost, in each case the investment in dealing with them is more effective than doing nothing. Ignoring these social challenges only exacerbates and further entrenches disadvantage resulting in higher costs in tertiary systems.

The notion of 'levelling the playing field' recognises that for some people, life is rigged against them. Early, intergenerational and locational disadvantages constrain opportunities and limit social mobility. However, it doesn't have to be this way. This submission offers an alternative vision that grants our most disadvantaged citizens a fair go.

The submission is organised so that the three main proposals are firstly outlined in separate briefs covering the key components and overall funding. These are followed by more detailed descriptions of each proposal with case studies, explanations, funding breakdowns and economic benefits.



BRIEF 01

Continuing Care Package

Action:

The Victorian Government should act to prevent homelessness among care leavers by funding a Continuing Care Package that supports young people until they turn 25.

Components

- 1. A Housing Guarantee that subsidises housing costs until the young person turns 25**
- 2. Caseworkers to support each young person to develop independent living skills and engage with education and training**

Housing Guarantee

About 800 young people leave care in Victoria every year.¹ Between a third to one half of these young people will become homeless within two years. This housing subsidy helps these at-risk young people by paying the shortfall between an affordable proportion of their income (25 per cent) and private rental market rates.

Caseworkers

Many young people in state care don't have the skills to live independently by the age of 18. The Victorian Government should fund dedicated support workers to support young people in continuing care to build the skills they need, get involved in education and training, and transition into independence.

Funding Summary

	Year 1	Year 2	Year 3	Year 4	Year 5	Year 6	Year 7
Housing Guarantee	\$1,258,400	\$2,516,800	\$3,775,200	\$5,033,600	\$6,292,000	\$7,327,840	\$8,141,120
Caseworkers	\$2,876,390	\$5,752,780	\$8,629,170	\$11,026,161	\$13,423,153	\$15,340,746	\$17,258,339
Total	\$4,134,790	\$8,269,580	\$12,404,370	\$16,059,761	\$19,715,153	\$22,668,586	\$25,399,459
Participants	400	800	1200	1600	2000	2400	2800
Cost per Participant	\$10,337	\$10,337	\$10,337	\$10,037	\$9,858	\$9,445	\$9,071

The cost of housing a young person in crisis accommodation is over \$50,000. Further research has found that homelessness can cost as much as \$1-\$5 million over a person's lifetime. In comparison, subsidising housing and support under this scheme costs less than \$10,000 a year and provides a firm foundation for future success rather than a lifetime of entrenched disadvantage.

1. Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (2015) Child Protection Australia: 2013-14. Child Welfare series no. 61. Cat. No. CWS 52. Canberra: AIHW.

BRIEF 02

Support for People Leaving Prison

Action:

The Victorian Government should fund a broad based housing and support package for people leaving prison to help them integrate into the community and reduce recidivism.

Components

1. Two year Stable Housing Subsidy
2. Housing Support Workers to help establish and maintain tenancies
3. Increased intensive case management support for those with complex needs

Stable Housing Subsidy

Having access to stable housing is one of the strongest predictors of whether someone will return to prison after being released. Therefore, making sure that people leaving prison have a stable and safe place to live is a key way to reduce recidivism and stop the revolving doors of Victorian prisons.

Housing Support Workers

Finding safe, affordable housing can be challenging at the best of times, but doing so from prison is particularly difficult. Housing workers are needed to help people plan for their exit from prison, find suitable properties and support tenancies.

Intensive Case Management

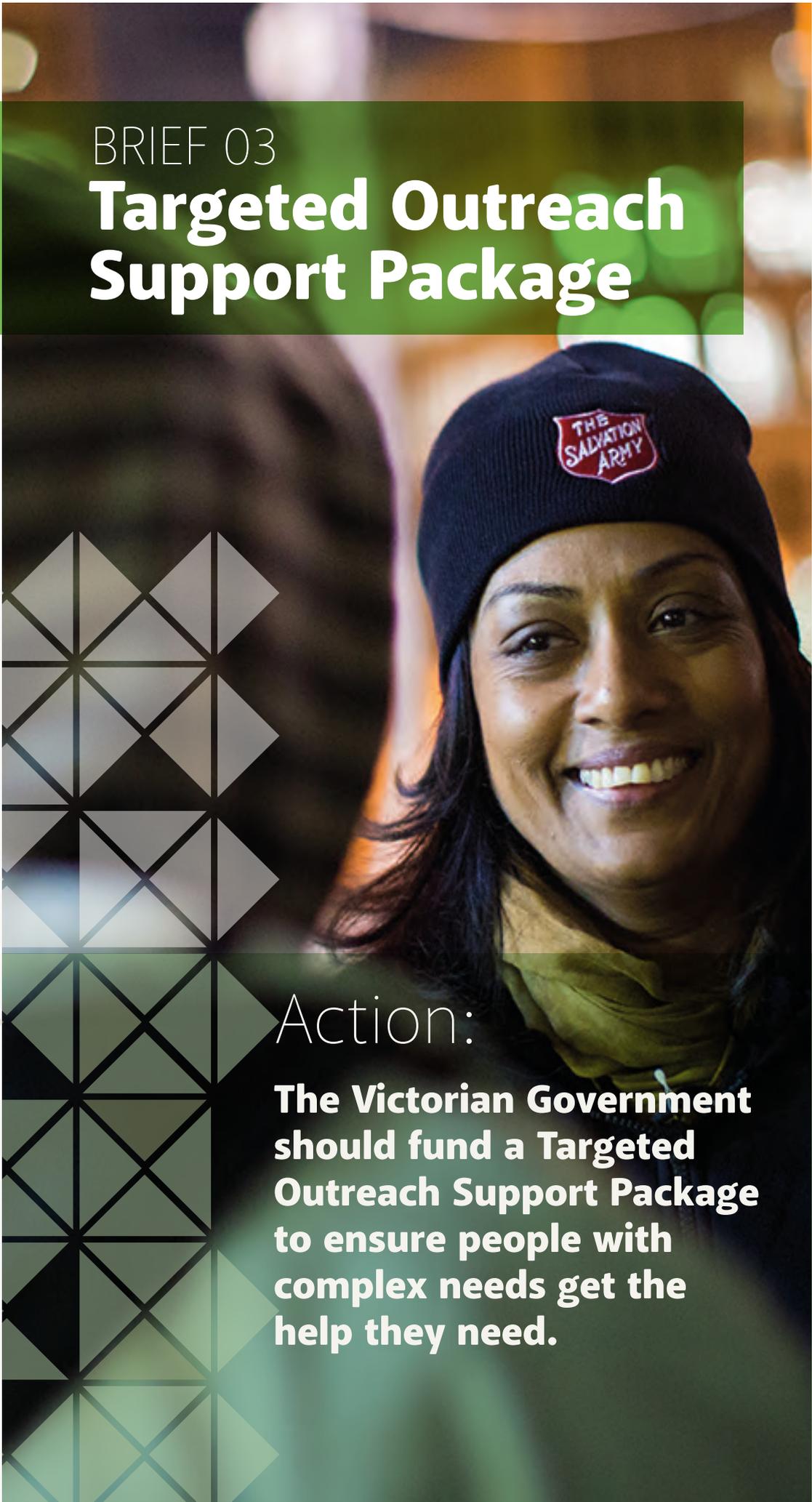
People experiencing multiple factors of disadvantage are over represented in the prison system, so many of them will need extra support to maintain housing and thrive in the community. Intensive case management needs to be available to help people address disadvantage and link them in with appropriate supports.

Funding Summary

	Year 1	Year 2
Stable Housing Subsidy	\$13,691,059	\$22,578,024
Housing Support Workers	\$8,767,557	\$13,151,336
Intensive Case Management Support	\$20,686,452	\$34,938,965
Total	\$43,145,068	\$70,668,325

Each prisoner costs the Victorian tax payer on average \$295,168 over three years.² This means that if only 239 people a year, just 4 per cent of all people exiting prison, avoid recidivism due to this initiative, the program will be cost neutral.

2. Victorian Ombudsman. (2015) Investigation into the rehabilitation and reintegration of prisoners in Victoria.

A woman with dark hair, wearing a black beanie with a red Salvation Army logo and a green scarf, is smiling. The background is blurred, showing warm lights. The image is overlaid with a green banner at the top and a geometric pattern on the left side.

BRIEF 03

Targeted Outreach Support Package

Action:

The Victorian Government should fund a Targeted Outreach Support Package to ensure people with complex needs get the help they need.

Components

1. **Assertive Outreach Workers**
2. **A 'step up' option to intensive case management from assertive outreach according to need**
3. **Priority access to social housing to fast track individuals into safe and stable accommodation**

Assertive Outreach Workers

It can be difficult for people with complex needs to access help, and some people avoid accessing services altogether after too many bad experiences. Instead of expecting people to come to us to get help, we need assertive outreach workers to go to them.

Intensive Case Management

Some individuals need more intensive support than an assertive outreach worker to stabilise their lives. To support them, there should be an intensive case management option to be 'stepped up' into until their situation is stabilised and support can be reduced.

Priority Access to Social Housing

Without a safe and secure place to live, it is impossible for people to find the stability they need to address other issues in their life. Due to the complex nature of this group's needs, social housing is the only viable option for this cohort of people.

Funding Summary

	Annual
No. of Participants	200
Assertive Outreach Workers	\$2,346,600
Intensive Case Management	\$1,173,300
Total	\$3,519,900

At an average cost of \$17,500 per person per annum, this scheme is far more cost effective than allowing someone to remain homeless. There is every indication that investment in this type of initiative has the capacity to generate millions of dollars' worth of savings to the Victorian community, especially in the areas of health and justice.³

3. Zaretsky, K., and Flatau, P. (2013) The cost of homelessness and the net benefit of homelessness programs: a national study. AHURI.

Continuing Care Package



Sally's Story

Sally was 13 years old when she first went into state care. By the time she was removed from home, the effects of abuse, neglect and an unstable childhood were already deeply embedded in her life.

Consequently, Sally never settled into out-of-home care and she spent most of her teenage years moving from placement

to placement. She found it difficult to stay in school or build healthy, trusting relationships with anyone. Repeated flashbacks from her childhood contributed

When Sally left state care at 18, she no longer had a secure place to live and became homeless within a year.

to declining mental health, which led to a range of negative coping strategies that increased her vulnerability and placed her at risk.

When Sally left state care at 18, she no longer had a secure place to live and became homeless within a year. Sally continues to be haunted by her traumatic childhood. As a result, her lifestyle has been erratic, marked by substance abuse, frequent interactions with police and stays in mental health wards. She finds it extremely hard to trust people and services have struggled to provide the support she needs to stabilise her life and achieve her tremendous potential.

Earlier this year, Sally found refuge in a Salvation Army crisis accommodation service. Here Sally is making the effort needed to establish new relationships and learning to trust enough to share some of her history with people. She still struggles with her mental health and had to be hospitalised for a short time. Nevertheless, the service is providing Sally the stable environment and support she needs to deal with her past and provide hope for a better future. It is clear that this won't happen overnight and that Sally's pathway towards independence will require long term, resilient relationships and secure tenure.

Action

The Victorian Government should act to prevent homelessness among care leavers by funding a Continuing Care Package that supports young people until they turn 25.

4. Australian Institute of Health and Welfare. (2012). Child Protection Australia 2010-11 Child Welfare series no. 53. Cat. No. CWS 41. Canberra: Australian Institute of Health and Welfare.
5. Crane, P and Jatinder Kaur and Judith Burton. (2013) Queensland University of Technology, School of Public Health and Social Work. Homelessness and leaving care: The experiences of young adults in Queensland and Victoria, and implications for practice.
6. McDowall, J. (2009) CREATE Foundation Report Care 2009: Transitioning from Care, Tracking Progress.
7. Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs and the National Framework Implementation Working Group. (2010) Transitioning from out of home care to independence.
8. Johnson, G. and Chamberlain, C. (2008) Australian Journal of Social Issues, Vol 43 No 4.
9. Council to Homeless Persons (2015) Pre-Budget Submission 2016-17.
10. Reed, J. (2014) To improve the life outcomes for young people transitioning from statutory care to independence. The Winston Churchill Memorial Trust of Australia and the Create Foundation.
11. Snapshot data of young people 15 and over at The Salvation Army's Westcare service suggest that roughly half of young people stay with their foster care family or return to their biological family once they turn 18. The other half exit care to independent living.
12. Mendes, P., Baidawi, S., and Snow, P. (2013) Young People Transitioning from Out-of-Home Care: A Critical Analysis of Leaving Care Policy, Legislation and Housing Support in the Australian State of Victoria. Child Abuse Review Vol. 23: 402-414.

What's the Problem?

Every year, about 800 young Victorians leave the care of the state when they turn 18.⁴ Thirty to fifty per cent of this group become homeless within two years of leaving care.⁵

A 2009 survey of young people who had left care conducted by the CREATE Foundation found that 35 per cent of young people reported having experienced homelessness within the first year of leaving.⁶ These young people are also more likely to experience homelessness throughout the rest of their life. Approximately 25 per cent of care leavers who became homeless after leaving care were still homeless seven years later.⁷ Because of this, care leavers are disproportionately present amongst homeless populations. One Australian study of nearly 1700 people in contact with homelessness services revealed that 42% had previously been in state care.⁸

Those most likely to become homeless after leaving care include:

- Aboriginal young people, who are also 15 times more likely to be in out-of-home care in the first place;
- Young people who have had higher numbers of care placements; and
- Young people who leave care early (from 15 years old onwards).⁹

There are currently minimal supports for young people leaving care. Despite it being mandated in state legislation that all children in state care have a transition from care plan, most young people still do not have such a plan or are unaware that such a plan exists and had no input into its development.¹⁰ As a result, most of the young people who leave care into independent living arrangements are missing out on the support they need to make this transition successful.

Some young people stay with their foster families after turning 18, whilst others return to their biological families, regardless of whether

Every year, about 800 young Victorians leave the care of the state when they turn 18. Thirty to fifty per cent of this group become homeless within two years of leaving care.

the risks that led to them being put in care persist.¹¹ Young people who cannot live in a family home find it difficult to secure private rental

or access social housing. Without support many of these living arrangements will break down within the first 12 months, resulting in the young person becoming homeless.

Many out-of-home care providers, including The Salvation Army, try to support the young people leaving their care with post care support. However, these programs are either under-funded or not funded at all and agencies struggle to provide the level of support that young people need.

A report last year from the Commission for Children and Young People suggested that having taken over the primary care role, the state needs to ensure that it looks after its young people 'as a good parent would'. This means that the state cannot relinquish its responsibility for transitioning its most vulnerable children to independence at the age of 18 when too few are ready.

Having taken over the primary care role, the state needs to ensure that it looks after its young people 'as a good parent would'.

Many young people leaving care have emotional, social and developmental delays because of the trauma and abuse they have experienced. As a result, although these young people are chronologically 18, many are developmentally much younger.¹² Most young people today are not prepared for independent living at 18 years of age, even if they are fully functioning and come from supportive families. Expecting a young person who has experienced trauma, abuse and neglect, and as a result may be developmentally only 13 years old, to live on their own with no supports is unrealistic and setting them up to fail.

The proposed Continuing Care Package outlined on the following pages is about the state continuing to care for its children, the way any decent parent would. By stabilising each at-risk young person's housing, it mitigates the risk of homelessness and immediate and ongoing disadvantage and provides a firm foundation upon which future success can be built. Alongside secure housing, support will be provided that recognises and addresses each young person's individual barriers to independent living, builds upon their capabilities and strengths, and supports their engagement with vocational education and training. This level of extended care is vital to breaking the cycle of disadvantage that too many of our young people become trapped in for life.

How Can the Problem be Fixed?

A 2014 research project explored the factors that supported young people's successful transitions from care in the Netherlands, France and the UK and compares them to the Australian experience. This report found that all the young people who had positive transition-from-care experiences had access to stable housing and support networks, which included continued relationships with a caseworker, peer supports and mentors, friends and, where possible, contact with siblings and biological families.¹³

These findings support our experience in the out-of-home care and transitional care systems—that young people need a safe, affordable and stable place to live. They need people in their life to support them, to help them build independent living skills and social support networks. Both elements are included in our proposed Continuing Care Package.

Components of Continuing Care Package

1. A Housing Guarantee that subsidises housing costs until the young person turns 25.
2. Caseworkers to support each young person to develop independent living skills and engage with education and training.

1. Housing Guarantee

This Housing Guarantee is a housing subsidy to help at-risk young people by paying the shortfall between an affordable proportion of their income (25 per cent) and private rental market rates.

T1: Funding Breakdown of Housing Guarantee

	Year 1	Year 2	Year 3	Year 4	Year 5	Year 6	Year 7
Rent	\$160	\$160	\$160	\$160	\$160	\$160	\$160
Youth Allowance	\$214	\$214	\$214	\$214	\$214	\$214	\$214
Commonwealth Rent Assistance	\$46	\$46	\$46	\$46	\$46	\$46	\$46
Contribution Rate	25%	25%	25%	25%	25%	30%	35%
Participant Rent Contribution	\$54	\$54	\$54	\$54	\$54	\$64	\$75
Victorian Housing Subsidy	\$61	\$61	\$61	\$61	\$61	\$50	\$39
Annual Subsidy Cost	\$3,146	\$3,146	\$3,146	\$3,146	\$3,146	\$2,590	\$2,033
No. of New Participants	400	400	400	400	400	400	400
Total No. of Participants	400	800	1200	1600	2000	2400	2800
Total State-wide Cost	\$1,258,400	\$2,516,800	\$3,775,200	\$5,033,600	\$6,292,000	\$7,328,000	\$8,141,200

13. Reed, J. (2014) To improve the life outcomes for young people transitioning from statutory care to independence. The Winston Churchill Memorial Trust of Australia and the Create Foundation.

14. DHHS Rental Report June 2015.

15. Australian Institute of Health and Welfare. (2012). Child Protection Australia 2010-11 Child Welfare series no. 53. Cat. No. CWS 41. Canberra: Australian Institute of Health and Welfare.

16. CHP Leaving Care Proposal.

T1: Notes and assumptions:

- Rent costs are based on the median weekly rental costs for 2 and 3 bedroom houses across Metropolitan Melbourne and Regional Victoria,¹⁴ assuming most young people will live in share house accommodation. Actual rental costs will vary.
- The Victorian Housing Subsidy is set to ensure that the participant only pays 25 per cent of their income in rent for the first five years of their Continuing Care Package, regardless of their income amount.
- To estimate the cost of this policy, the Victorian Housing Subsidy is calculated based on a participant's sole income being Youth Allowance. This amount could vary if a participant's income changes, for example after they have gained employment.
- Commonwealth Rent Assistance (CRA) is calculated on the full cost of rental. The actual value of CRA depends upon the mechanism used for delivering the Victorian Housing Subsidy—e.g. whether it is paid as a reimbursement to the tenant.
- Participants' contribution rate increases in the last two years of the Continuing Care Package to prepare them for independence.
- Approximately 800 young people exit state care in Victoria every year.¹⁵ Of this group, it is estimated that about half exit to independent living.¹⁶
- The cost of this policy is calculated based on the 400 young people who do not have the option to stay with a foster family and thus are forced to live independently from 18 years of age and are at extreme risk of homelessness. The actual number of young people to enter the scheme will vary from year to year based on the needs of young people that are identified by their transition from care plans.

2. Caseworkers

Having secure and affordable housing is essential for young people to transition to independence without becoming homeless. However, housing alone is not enough.

Many young people in state care don't have the skills to live independently by the age of 18. The Victorian Government should fund dedicated caseworkers to support young people in continuing care to build the skills they need, get involved in education and training, and transition into independence.

T2: Notes and assumptions:

- The caseworker to participant ratio is based on a continuing care model run by The Salvation Army. This ratio allows caseworkers to work intensively with young people as they enter continuing care and then tapers off as young people get older and gain independence.
- Caseworkers have been costed at SCHADS award 5.1 plus 20% on costs.

T2: Funding Breakdown of Casework Support

	Year 1	Year 2	Year 3	Year 4	Year 5	Year 6	Year 7
No. of New Participants	400	400	400	400	400	400	400
Total No. of Participants	400	800	1200	1600	2000	2400	2800
Caseworker Ratio	10	10	10	12	12	15	15
No. of Caseworkers	40	80	120	153	187	213	240
Caseworker Cost	\$2,876,390	\$5,752,780	\$8,629,170	\$11,026,161	\$13,423,153	\$15,340,746	\$17,258,339

T3: Funding Summary of Continuing Care Package

	Year 1	Year 2	Year 3	Year 4	Year 5	Year 6	Year 7
Housing Guarantee	\$1,258,400	\$2,516,800	\$3,775,200	\$5,033,600	\$6,292,000	\$7,327,840	\$8,141,120
Caseworkers	\$2,876,390	\$5,752,780	\$8,629,170	\$11,026,161	\$13,423,153	\$15,340,746	\$17,258,339
Total	\$4,134,790	\$8,269,580	\$12,404,370	\$16,059,761	\$19,715,153	\$22,668,586	\$25,399,459
Participants	400	800	1200	1600	2000	2400	2800
Cost per Participant	\$10,337	\$10,337	\$10,337	\$10,037	\$9,858	\$9,445	\$9,071

Economic Benefits

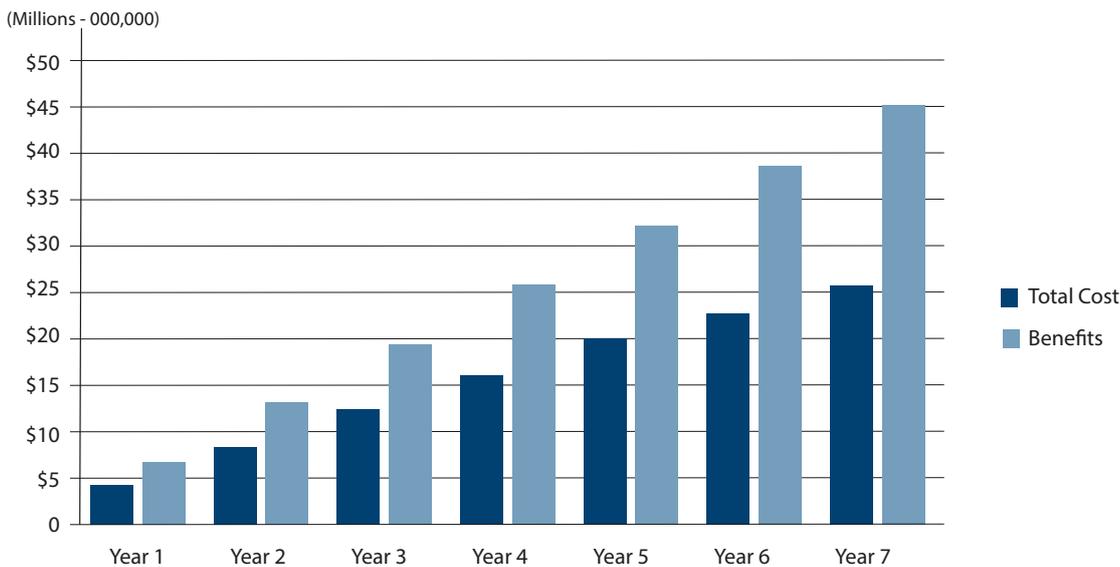
An analysis of three Salvation Army youth crisis accommodation facilities across Victoria showed that the median cost of youth homelessness to Government was \$42,354 per young person per annum.¹⁷ Because the cost of running each facility is also subsidised by Salvation Army fundraising, the total median cost per person was higher at \$50,557. These costs can be avoided by providing much cheaper rental subsidies and support that stabilise at-risk young people at critical times in their life.

Children and young people who experience homelessness earlier in life are more likely to experience homelessness again as an adult. Research into the lifetime costs of homelessness found that homelessness can cost as much as \$1-5 million per person over the course of their lifetime.¹⁸

This Continuing Care Package is about preventing youth homelessness and thus reducing the risk of homelessness later in life. Subsidising housing under this scheme only costs \$69,422 per young person throughout their time in continuing care—less than \$10,000 per year.

Preliminary projections over the next decade show this Continuing Care Package delivering almost \$120 million in net economic benefits with a benefit cost ratio of 1.8.¹⁹ This does not include the social benefits of enabling each young person a real opportunity to engage in education and employment and avoid becoming trapped in welfare dependency and poverty.

G1: Continuing Care Package — Cost/Benefits



Conclusion

The State's expectation that all of the young people under its care are ready to survive on their own at 18 years of age is clearly flawed, as evidenced by repeated studies into the poor social outcomes for kids in care. In the end, the young people are the ones who bear the costs of these failed policies for the rest of their lives. We want the Victorian Government to act like a good parent and ensure that every young person in its care does not become homeless and has a chance at a real future.

17. Analysis based on funding for activities 20081, 20082, 94658. Because individuals typically receive services across multiple funded activities, the 20081 Service Delivery Tracking figures were chosen to represent the client base.

18. Baldry, E., Dowse, L., McCausland, R., and Clarence, M. (2012) Life course institutional costs of homelessness for vulnerable groups. University of New South Wales. Australian Government, Department of Families Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs.

19. This analysis is based upon a success rate of 80% though even a drop as low as 50% yields benefits that outweigh the costs.

Support for People Leaving Prison



John's Story

John is 26 and first went to prison in his late teens for drug related charges. Since then he has been incarcerated four times, exiting into insecure accommodation each time with no support. John has had several bouts of rough sleeping after successive forms of accommodation fell through. The last time he was released, he went to a rooming house that contained 60 other people, many of whom he knew from prison.

The rooming house had shared facilities and his small room held only a bed. Although John was determined to make a fresh start and avoid using drugs, on the first day at the rooming house an older man offered to sell him ice or cannabis. John managed to say no. On the second day, John heard fighting and when he opened his door he saw two men assaulting each other, so he stayed in his room for the entire day.

Desperate to get out of this environment, John looked for other accommodation options but he could only afford another rooming house. He moved a week later, but it quickly became obvious that this new place was no better than the last. Within a week John was scared, bored and lonely, so he had a few drinks with other tenants out the back and ended up using ice. The other tenants were talking about getting money by robbing the shop down the road. After three days on ice, John robbed a house and was later convicted and sentenced to a further six months in prison.

Each time John has been incarcerated, he loses hope that his life can be any different. He wants to get his act together and see more of his kids but without stable housing and some support outside, he can't see how that will happen.

Action

The Victorian Government should fund a broad based housing and support package for people leaving prison to help them integrate into the community and reduce recidivism.

What's the Problem?

Unstable housing is one of the surest paths back to prison

Access to sustainable housing is one of the most important determinative factors for recidivism. Research into the relationship between recidivism and accommodation found that people were most likely to return to prison if they were homeless or transient—specifically if they moved more than twice in a three month period, immediately after release.²⁰

Research into the relationship between recidivism and accommodation found that people were most likely to return to prison if they were homeless or transient.

Unfortunately, homelessness is a common experience for people leaving prison. A report

by the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare noted that 43 per cent of exiting prisoners expected to be homeless once released.²¹ In 2013-14, the Department of Justice and Regulation recorded 5,877 people exited from prison.²² That equals around 2,350 people exiting into homelessness every year.

The current housing affordability crisis in Australia is contributing to this homelessness rate. Stable and affordable housing is nearly impossible for people leaving prison to access. Private rental is unaffordable, and breaks in rental history, as well as prejudices against ex-prisoners, tend to lock this group out of the market. Social housing options are also very limited and waiting lists are untenably long.

Community Service Organisations funded to provide transitional support to people leaving prison attempt to prevent prisoners from exiting into homelessness. However, too often the only housing solutions available are the kind of rooming houses mentioned in the case study above. The Salvation Army's experience is that these accommodation options often break down within a matter of weeks. The Victorian Ombudsman's *Investigation into the rehabilitation and reintegration of prisoners in Victoria* supports our experience finding that 22 per cent of male prisoners and 44 per cent of female prisoners became homeless after a period of supported accommodation following release.²³

The nexus between homelessness, imprisonment and recidivism becomes an ongoing vicious circle. A recent report from the University of Melbourne showed that people who had been imprisoned were about twice as likely to become homeless (41.5 per cent compared to 20.9 per cent) and to remain homeless for longer periods.²⁴ We know that homelessness is the strongest predictor of recidivism and that as many as 35 per cent of Victorian prisoners reported being homeless prior to entering prison.²⁵ Victorian recidivism rates are now at an all-time high of 45 per cent²⁶ and half of all prisoners have served a sentence previously.²⁷

The high volume of people in Victorian prisons who have been in prison before shows that our current efforts to rehabilitate and reintegrate offenders back into the community are failing.

Research into recidivism has found that if

a person is going to return to prison, they are most likely to do so within two years of release. Just over 30 per cent of all exiting prisoners will return within a year and another 14 per cent will return to prison in their second year post release.²⁸

The high volume of people in Victorian prisons who have been in prison before shows that our current efforts to rehabilitate and reintegrate offenders back into the community are failing. These failures are not only costly to the Victorian Government and taxpayers, but they also contribute to increasing community insecurity and are not effective in reducing crime. By giving people leaving prison an affordable, stable place to live for the first two years after release, we would remove the biggest reason people return to prison.

20. Baldry, Eileen and Desmond McDonnell, Peter Maplestone and Mau Peters. (2004) AHURI Research and Policy Bulletin. The role of housing in preventing re-offending. Issue 36.

21. AIHW (2013) The Health of Australia's Prisoners 2012.

22. Department of Justice and Regulation (2015) Key Statistics on the Victorian Prison System 2009-10 2013-14.

23. Victorian Ombudsman (2015) Investigation into the rehabilitation and reintegration of prisoners in Victoria.

24. Bevitt, A., Chigavazira, A., Heralut, N., Johnson, G., Moschion, J., Scutella, R., Tseng, Y., Wooden, M., and Kalb, G. (2015) Journey's Home: Research Report. University of Melbourne. No 6.

25. Victorian Ombudsman. (2015) Investigation into the rehabilitation and reintegration of prisoners in Victoria.

26. Victorian State Budget Papers (2015-16).

27. Australian Bureau of Statistics (2014) Prisoners in Australia: Victoria Snapshot. <http://www.abs.gov.au/ausstats/abs@.nsf/Lookup/by%20Subject/4517.0~2014~Main%20Features-Victoria~10016>.

Reintegration fails without good supports

People with multiple and complex needs are significantly over represented in prisons. In 2010, the Victorian Government estimated that 48.5 per cent of Victorian prisoners experienced two or more characteristics of serious disadvantage, including unemployment, homelessness, being addicted to alcohol or drugs, having an intellectual disability or psychiatric admission, and being of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander descent.²⁹ In 2015, the Victorian Ombudsman found as many as 35 per cent of Victorian prisoners were homeless four weeks before entering prison, 42 per cent of men and 33 per cent of women had an ABI, and 40 per cent of Victorian prisoners had a mental health condition.³⁰

Such high concentrations of disadvantage inside Victorian prisons mean that a large proportion, likely as many as 40-50 per cent, of people exiting prison need intensive support to successfully reintegrate into society. These high rates of disadvantage among prisoner populations helps explain why, along with lacking safe and affordable housing, so many people leaving prison cannot get their lives back on track once they exit and end up re-offending. If we are going to reduce recidivism, we need to offer people safe and affordable places to live and give them the support they need to stabilise their lives, address their reasons for offending in the first place and be able to work towards a better future.

The programs that currently exist to support exiting prisoners can only work with a small fraction of those who need help to reintegrate back into the community and the level of support offered is not enough. The new

Corrections Victoria Reintegration Pathway is targeted to assist just 1,000 prisoners (17 per cent) of those exiting prison, only a slight improvement on the 15 per cent that the program's predecessor assisted in 2013/14.³¹ Less than 2 per cent of exiting prisoners were provided post-release housing through Corrections Victoria.³² The Ombudsman's 2014 discussion paper found that many prisoners taking part in the Reintegration Pathway program received much less than 30 hours of support, including travel time, which is insufficient for a complex and high needs target group.

Each time a person does not get access to one of these programs or does not get the

level of support they need for the time they need it, their chances of ending up back in prison are increased. The Salvation Army supports the recommendation made last year by Jesuit Social Services that transitional supports need to be 'longer, deeper and fuller'.³³ Taking this problem seriously means significantly increasing the capacity of existing support services, so that all those who have done their time have a real chance of a better life.

Less than 2 per cent of exiting prisoners were provided post-release housing through Corrections Victoria.

How Can the Problem be Fixed?

Whilst many of the problems of our criminal justice system are complex, some are relatively straightforward and can be tackled head on. There is clear evidence both that a lack of stable housing and support increases the likelihood that a person will end up back in prison and that the provision of these acts as protective factors against recidivism.

Components of Leaving Prison Package

1. Two year Stable Housing Subsidy.
2. Housing Support Workers to help establish and maintain tenancies.
3. Increased intensive case management support for those with complex needs.

28. Figures are calculated based on findings by the Victorian Department of Justice. (2007) Corrections Research Paper Series. Who returns to prison? Patterns of recidivism among prisoners released from custody in Victoria 2002-03. Paper No 1 and the current rate of recidivism in Victoria.

29. State Government of Victoria, Growing Victoria Together, Progress Report Service Delivery 2010-11, Appendix B.

30. Victorian Ombudsman. (2015) Investigation into the rehabilitation and reintegration of prisoners in Victoria.

31. Ibid.

32. Ibid

33. Jesuit Social Services (2014) Strengthening prisoner transition to create a safer Victoria.

1. Stable Housing Subsidy

Having access to stable housing upon release from prison is one of the strongest predictors of whether someone will return to prison after being released. Therefore, making sure that people leaving prison have a stable and safe place to live is a key way to reduce recidivism and stop the revolving doors of Victorian prisons.

Social housing, especially public housing, is the most stable housing option to establish a foundation for ex-prisoners' re-entry into the community. However, recognising the untenable gaps between supply and demand in social housing and current waiting lists, we have focused on private rental subsidies, which the Victorian Ombudsman cited as a possible option for exiting prisoners, as a pragmatic compromise. Even if the Victorian Government were to embark today upon a large scale and long term investment in the capital expansion of social housing that is required to meet these needs (and it should), interim solutions such as the one proposed here would be necessary for years to come.

T4: Funding Breakdown of Stable Housing Subsidy

	Year 1	Year 2
Weekly Rent	\$243	\$243
Weekly Income (Newstart)	\$262	\$262
Commonwealth Rent Assistance	\$65	\$65
Contribution Rate	25%	40%
Participant Rent Contribution	\$66	\$105
Stable Housing Subsidy	\$112	\$73
Annual Subsidy Cost	\$5,824	\$3,780
No. of New Participants	2351	2351
Total No. of Participants	2351	4702
Total State-wide Housing Cost	\$13,691,059	\$22,578,024

T4: Notes and assumptions:

- The number of participants is calculated on 40 per cent of all exiting prisoners who expect to become homeless upon exiting.
- Numbers of exiting prisoners in Victoria is based on the Department of Justice and Regulation 2013-14 report which recorded 5,877 people leaving prison that year. Actual numbers of participants will vary.
- Finding appropriate housing at the volume required for this program will be a key challenge. For the purpose of costing, we use a one-bedroom unit, however these may not be available in all areas at the quantity or cost required. Private rooming houses, which figure highly in current exit scenarios, should be avoided as unsuitable housing increases the likelihood of return to prison.
- Rent costs are based on the DHHS Rental Report June 2015 median rental costs for a one bedroom apartment in Melbourne. Actual rental costs will vary.
- The Stable Housing Subsidy is set to ensure that the participant only pays 25 per cent of their income in rent for the first year of the housing support.
- Participants' contribution rate increases for the second year of the housing subsidy to prepare them for the end of the support.
- The cost of the Stable Housing Subsidy is calculated based on participants receiving Newstart allowance. This amount could vary if a participant's income changes, for example after they have gained employment.
- Commonwealth Rent Assistance (CRA) is calculated on the full cost of rental. The actual value of CRA depends upon the mechanism used for delivering the Stable Housing Subsidy—e.g. whether it is paid as a reimbursement to the tenant.

2. Housing Support Workers

Finding safe, affordable housing can be challenging at the best of times, but doing so from prison is particularly difficult. Housing workers are needed to help people plan for their exit from prison by helping them find a property and go through the necessary processes to apply and secure it. Once stable housing has been established, the housing workers' role shifts to supporting tenancies so they can be maintained over the long term.

T5: Funding Breakdown of Housing Support Workers

	Year 1	Year 2
No. of New Participants	2351	2351
Total No. of Participants	2351	4702
Housing Worker Ratio	20	40
No. of Housing Workers	118	176
Housing Worker Cost	\$8,767,557	\$13,151,336

T5: Notes and assumptions:

- Housing worker costs are based on SCHADS Social Worker Level 5/PPI (S51VSA) with 20% on costs.

3. Intensive Case Management

Because people experiencing multiple factors of disadvantage are over represented in the prison system, it is likely that those who leave will need more than housing to thrive in the community. These people need access to an intensive case management option that can help them address individual factors of disadvantage and link them in with appropriate supports in the broader service system and the community.

Our proposed model for intensive case management is based on 30 per cent of exiting prisoners requiring intensive case management, which is higher than current levels of support but still lower than the level of need suggested by prisoner demographics. It also significantly expands supports available in the critical first year after release, with decreased but still important levels of support in the second year.

T6: Funding Breakdown of Intensive Case Management Support

	Year 1	Year 2
No. of New Participants	1763	1763
Total No. of Participants	1763	3526
Intensive Case Management Worker Ratio	10	15
No. of Intensive Case Management Workers	176	294
Case Management Cost per Participant	\$10,733	\$7,084
Case Management Cost	\$18,923,352	\$31,412,765
Brokerage per Participant	\$1,000	\$1,000
Brokerage Cost	\$1,763,100	\$3,526,200
Total Statewide Intensive Case Management Costs	\$20,686,452	\$34,938,965

T6: Notes and assumptions:

- Prisoner population demographics suggest that between 40-50 per cent of prisoners need intensive case management support due to their complex needs.
- Costs for intensive case management are initially calculated at 30 per cent of all exiting prisoners (5,877) every year to offer this support to the most complex people exiting prison. Actual numbers of participants will vary.
- After initial implementation and evaluation of this intensive case management support initiative, case management capacity should be increased over time to meet the needs of all 40-50 per cent of exiting prisoners with complex needs.
- The cost of case management support is calculated based on current funding levels for Salvation Army intensive case management programs with similar client groups.

T7: Funding Summary of Support for People Leaving Prison

	Year 1	Year 2
Stable Housing Subsidy	\$13,691,059	\$22,578,024
Housing Support Workers	\$8,767,557	\$13,151,336
Intensive Case Management Support	\$20,686,452	\$34,938,965
Total	\$43,145,068	\$70,668,325

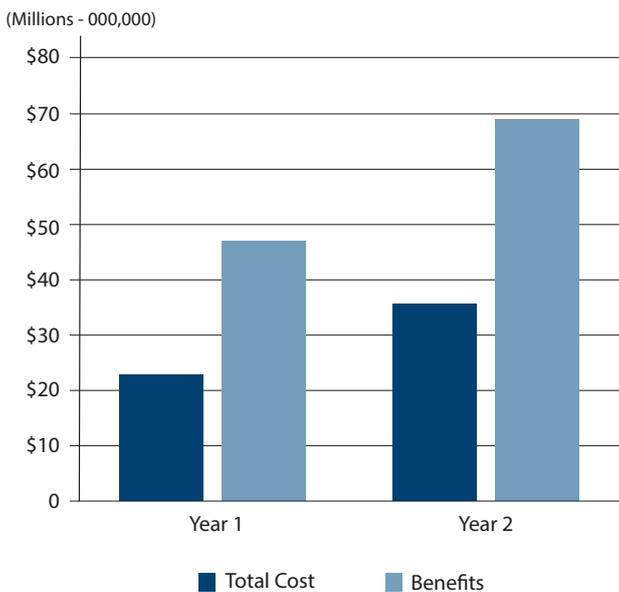
Economic Benefits

Research on exiting prisoners in Victoria and New South Wales showed that those in stable housing, such as public housing or assisted rental, were nearly 20 per cent less likely to return to prison than those in less stable forms of housing. Those prisoners who rated their own accommodation as 'unsuitable' were 31 per cent more likely to return to prison. Of those in stable housing, only 34 per cent returned to prison.³⁴ If the current rates of prison return (45 per cent) were reduced to 34 per cent, it would save around \$63.7 million per annum. These statistics show the effectiveness of providing secure, affordable housing as a mechanism to reduce recidivism.

Each prisoner costs the Victorian tax payer \$295,168 over the course of an average three year sentence.³⁵ This means that if only 239 people a year, just 4 per cent of all people exiting prison, avoid recidivism due to this initiative, the program will be cost neutral.

Just assessing the costs of providing rental subsidies and housing workers against the benefits of avoided incarceration costs, the Leaving Prison Package has been initially evaluated to deliver a benefit cost ratio of 1.9 and a net present value of benefits of approximately \$250 million.³⁶ It is also important to note that this simplified cost-benefit assessment leaves out many other expected economic and social benefits, such as potentially greater workforce participation and a reduction in the negative social impact imposed on families when a close family member is incarcerated.

G2: Leaving Prison Package—Cost/Benefits



Conclusion

In September 2015, the Victorian Ombudsman noted the spiralling costs of our prison system, which have risen by 31 per cent since 2011 to over \$1 billion. This figure doesn't account for capital expenditure of a further \$670 million for the construction of the new Ravenhall Prison or the associated \$1.6 billion in operational costs for that one prison alone over the next 25 years.³⁷

Despite all of this money, people continue to cycle in and out of prisons, no better off than when they began and most times worse. It is time to stop haemorrhaging money into a system that doesn't rehabilitate people, doesn't make us safer and strips public money from other vital services like hospitals and schools. This support program for people exiting prison will stop the revolving door of prisons, remove the need to spend billions of dollars on capital expansions and free up money to invest in services that make our state a better place to live.

34. Baldry, Eileen and Desmond McDonnell, Peter Maplestone and Manu Peters. (2003) Ex-prisoners and accommodation: what bearing do different forms of housing have on social reintegration (AHURI Final Report no. 46).

35. Victorian Ombudsman. (2015) Investigation into the rehabilitation and reintegration of prisoners in Victoria.

36. This assessment is taken over a ten year period and based on a success rate of 66%.

37. Ibid.

Targeted Outreach Support Package



Bill's Story

Bill's first contact with The Salvation Army was at a large homeless men's shelter in the mid-1990s. Since then he has come and gone through several different services with no long lasting success. There is still no conclusive diagnosis of mental illness or ABI and attempts to medicate his most prevalent symptoms have had mixed results over the years. His cognitive capacity and challenging behaviours are also frequently impacted by excessive use of alcohol and drugs.

Bill has been housed many times but struggles to maintain tenancies for more than a few months. Issues with the condition Bill left his previous properties, including two incidents of fire damage, have severely limited his future accommodation options.

The recent introduction of a case coordination approach between the various agencies with which Bill has regular contact has shown promise. However, the most positive results have come from those case manager relationships that have lasted the longest. The ability to establish trust and show the resilience of these relationships despite significant challenges has resulted in the most productive engagement with Bill so far.

Action

The Victorian Government should fund a Targeted Outreach Support Package to ensure people with complex needs get the help they need.

What's the Problem?

Most of our social support systems are not designed for people who have multiple and complex needs. Single-problem oriented services aim to provide targeted, efficient assistance to the greatest number of people in the shortest time possible. Whilst this kind of system can work for many, it can also further exacerbate the disadvantage and marginalisation of those it fails.

Many people with complex needs have existed on the fringes of society their whole lives and their experience of our service systems, including as wards of the state and institutionalisation, has created a profound distrust. As a result, they avoid using social and community services until they are in crisis and end up in the hospital emergency department or are picked up by police. Consequently, people with complex needs are grossly over represented in institutions like prisons, clinical mental health wards and emergency departments.

Access to mainstream services like GPs, psychiatrists, drug withdrawal and rehab centres, housing services, and now the NDIS, depends on being physically able to get to a service centre on time, sit calmly, quietly and look presentable in a waiting room and then articulate their needs clearly to a person they have never met.

For a group of people whose lives have been defined by broken relationships and betrayal, who don't have support from family or friends, have no access to transport, spent significant periods of their life in institutions where they have no personal autonomy to decide for themselves, and are living in the chaos of mental illness, disability, poor physical health, addictions, poverty, violence and homelessness—expecting them to access these services is unrealistic. Even if individuals manage to get to a service, single-problem oriented services cannot untangle the symptoms of coexisting mental health, substance abuse and intellectual disability and, more often than not, are unable to provide a diagnosis; and so these people fall through the gaps and continue to cycle in and out of the service system and institutions.

An evaluation of the NDIS trial in the Barwon area confirmed that people with complex needs could not access this new service stream. Surveys and interviews with potential clients and support staff found that people are not accessing the NDIS because they do not trust the worker, cannot access transport to get to an assessment office, are too physically unwell to get there, cannot get the paper work to support their application (including evidence of a formal diagnosis), behaviourally cannot sit or take part in an assessment, or do not feel they have a permanent disability—or a combination of all the above.³⁸ As of December 2014, Barwon mental health services knew of 49 people who were eligible for the NDIS but had declined or withdrawn from the service and another 46 people who had received mental health support under the previous system but no longer qualified for support under the NDIS.³⁹

There are several small, sometimes isolated, programs that have been funded over the years which are targeted towards this group of vulnerable people and have been successful. The Salvation Army's SANS program was one of the first outreach services to pioneer intensive support for people with complex needs after deinstitutionalisation.⁴⁰ A similar program, Oasis, provided intensive case management to men connected to The Salvation Army's Gill homeless shelter. Currently there are a range of services across Victoria with varying funding sources, program models and capacities trying to meet the needs of this high-needs client group, who have fallen through the gaps of our other systems. These programs, which have different levels and lengths of intensive case management and case coordination, range from the HACC Community Connections outreach programs, the Breaking the Cycle: Reducing Homelessness initiative, and the Intensive Case Management Initiative (ICMI), to specialist homelessness services such as Melbourne Street to Home (MS2H) and Journey to Social Inclusion (J2SI), and the Multiple and Complex Needs Initiative (MACNI).

38. Psychiatric Disability Services Victoria (VicServ). (2015) Learn and Build in Barwon: The impact of the National Disability Insurance Scheme on the provision of mental health services in the Barwon launch site.

39. Ibid

The best outcomes come from programs with low case loads, flexible brokerage funds, extended support periods and priority access to permanent housing. The most accessible programs also work with people based on a person's ability to function in the community, not on a diagnosis. Although evaluation and research shows that many of these programs achieve good outcomes for a vulnerable and hard-to-reach cohort of people,⁴¹ funding has been ad hoc and mostly these programs are small and geographically constrained, meaning that many people with multiple needs are still falling through the gaps.

The State has yet to adequately fund the services required by this target group throughout Victoria —programs that can both meet demand and provide longitudinal support. That is why we are asking the Victorian Government to

The best outcomes come from programs with low case loads, flexible brokerage funds, extended support periods and priority access to permanent housing.

fund a targeted outreach support package across the state for people with complex needs, including chronic disease, untreated medical conditions, mental illness, ABI, substance abuse, intellectual disability and homelessness. This package will build on existing programs and increase case workers' capacity to work with people over a long period to build effective, trusting relationships and engage them with the parts of the wider service system to which they need access. Priority access to social housing will enable workers to house the people they are working with as soon as they feel ready and keep their housing regardless of the challenges and interruptions common to this client group. The goal of this package will be to reduce the institutionalisation of people with complex needs, help them live in the community, and where possible help them engage with other mainstream services and support systems like the NDIS.

How Can the Problem be Fixed?

There are enough examples of effective programs to demonstrate that good outcomes can be achieved even with the most complex clients. The challenge before us is to ensure that these kinds of programs are sufficiently resourced to operate on a scale big enough to service the client group, who are consistently underestimated.

Components of Targeted Outreach Support Package

1. Assertive outreach workers.
2. A 'step up' option to intensive case management from assertive outreach according to need.
3. Priority access to social housing to fast track individuals into safe and stable accommodation.

40. McDonald, P. (1993) Confronting the Chaos: A Report of the SANS Project. The Salvation Army Crossroads Housing and Support Network.

41. Johnson, G. and Chamberlain, C. (2015) Evaluation of the Melbourne Street to Home Program: Final Report. RMIT University. <http://www.homeground.org.au/assets/ms2h-final-rpt-4-publication-20150318.pdf>
Johnson, G., Kuehnle, D., Parkinson, S., Sesa, S., & Tseng, Y. (2014) Sustaining exits from long-term homelessness: A randomised controlled trial examining the 48 month social outcomes from the Journey to Social Inclusion pilot program. Sacred Heart Mission, St Kilda. https://www.sacredheartmission.org/sites/default/files/publication-documents/2si_sustaining_exits_from_longterm_homelessness_2015.pdf

1. Assertive Outreach Workers

It can be difficult for people with complex needs to access services for help. They may be too physically unwell, do not have transport to get there, or have been made to feel unwelcome in services because of their behaviour or physical presentation. Some people avoid accessing services altogether after too many bad experiences. Instead of expecting people to come to us to get help, we need assertive outreach workers to go to them.

T8: Funding breakdown of Assertive Outreach Workers

	Annual
No. of Participants	200
Assertive Outreach Worker Ratio	10
No. of Assertive Outreach Workers	20
Cost of Case Management per Participant	\$10,733
Brokerage per Participant	\$1,000
Total Cost per Participant	\$11,733
State-wide cost	\$2,346,600

T8: Notes and assumptions:

- Because so many people with complex needs avoid the service system and are difficult to engage, the true level of demand for this program is unknown.
- Initial scope for this package is 200 people across the state for the first year based on the number of people receiving support from similar services in specific geographic areas.
- This package should be reviewed on an annual basis to assess demand and adjust funding accordingly.
- The cost of case management support and brokerage is calculated based on current DHHS funding levels per target for existing similar programs run by The Salvation Army.

2. Intensive Case Management

After initial engagement with an assertive outreach worker it may become apparent that some individuals need more intensive support to stabilise their lives. To support these people there should be an intensive case management option to be 'stepped up' into until these people are stabilised and support can be lessened.

In addition, for many people with complex needs and histories of trauma, recovery from this trauma is not linear. Having a 'step-up, step-down' model of support means that case workers increase the level of support to people's need if they experience a crisis and need increased support for a shorter period of time before they get back on their feet. After the crisis subsides, the support can again be 'stepped-down'.

T9: Funding breakdown of Intensive Case Management

	Annual
No. of Participants	50
Intensive Case Management Worker Ratio	5
No. of Intensive Case Management Workers	10
Cost of Case Management per Participant	\$21,466
Brokerage per Participant	\$2,000
Total Cost per Participant	\$23,466
State-wide Cost	\$1,173,300

T9: Notes and assumptions:

- The number of participants needing intensive case management is estimated to be one quarter of those needing assertive outreach. This number should be reviewed on an annual basis to ensure funding levels continue to reflect demand.
- The cost of case management support and brokerage is calculated based on current DHHS funding levels per target for existing similar programs run by The Salvation Army.

3. Priority Access to Social Housing

Having a safe place to live is a basic human need. Without a safe and secure place to live, it is impossible for people to find the stability they need to address other issues in their life like chronic health conditions, untreated physical ailments including dental problems, underlying mental health issues, addictions and trauma. If we want to give these people a chance to become part of mainstream society, we need to give them a place to live first.

One of the most successful elements of the SANS program is the program's ability to secure and retain housing for people even when the person was in prison or hospital. For participants in the program, knowing they had a safe and secure place to come back to once they left the relevant institution and would not become homeless was a large factor in stabilising their mental health and helping them recover from trauma.⁴²

Because the private rental market is both unaffordable and unsustainable for this group, their only viable long term option is social housing. To maximise the benefit of the support package outlined above priority access to housing needs to be given to participants of this program.

T10: Funding Summary of Targeted Outreach Support Package

	Annual
No. of Participants	200
Assertive Outreach Workers	\$2,346,600
Intensive Case Management	\$1,173,300
Total	\$3,519,900

42. McDonald, P. (1993) Confronting the Chaos: A Report of the SANS Project. The Salvation Army Crossroads Housing and Support Network.

43. Baldry, E., Dowse, L., McCausland, R., and Clarence, M. (2012) Life course institutional costs of homelessness for vulnerable groups. University of New South Wales. Australian Government, Department of Families Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs.

44. Zaretsky, K., and Flatau, P. (2013) The cost of homelessness and the net benefit of homelessness programs: a national study. AHURI.

Economic Benefits

The people we are aiming to support with this initiative are some of the most vulnerable and disadvantaged people in our communities.

Research into the costs of homelessness and institutionalisation of vulnerable people over a lifetime found that people with complex needs, including those with mental health disorders and cognitive disabilities who were homeless and had involvement with the criminal justice system, cost between \$1-\$5 million per person over the course of their lifetime.⁴³ This cost does not include the social cost of disadvantage and lost employment opportunities.

At an average cost of \$17,500 per person per annum, this scheme is far more cost effective than allowing someone to remain homeless. There is every indication that investment in this type of initiative has the capacity to generate millions of dollars' worth of savings to the Victorian community, especially in the areas of health and justice.⁴⁴ A more rigorous economic analysis is needed to determine the full cost benefit of this type of program across all realms of our society.

Conclusion

The current system is not meeting the needs of this target group and we need to develop a different way of working with them. The Victorian Government can do this by implementing a Targeted Outreach Support Package that meets people where they are at and works with them to build relationships and increase their capacity to live in the community.

Additional Actions

The proposals outlined in this submission are designed to level the playing field for some of Victoria's most disadvantaged and vulnerable citizens. We have concentrated on these three areas because we believe that each one can have a significant positive impact on reducing lifelong and intergenerational disadvantage. They will also create flow on benefits to other parts of the community and reduce costs in tertiary systems.

However, these three proposals will not fix everything. In the past, The Salvation Army has made a number of recommendations to the Government about how to improve social policy outcomes in Victoria. Many of these recommendations have not been implemented and the problems out of which they arise continue to be reflected in the lives of those people who seek our help. They are listed here in recognition of their ongoing importance and a reminder that they need to continue to be on the Government's agenda.

Family Violence

- Raise funding for family violence services to match increased levels of demand, including fully funding the cost of responding to L17s
- Increase Safe at Home and Private Rental Brokerage funding so that all women affected by family violence can have safe, secure housing tenure
- Introduce parallel funding for specific support services to be available for children who have been impacted by family violence

Housing Affordability

- Develop an affordable housing strategy that includes increasing social housing to at least five per cent of all Victorian housing stock
- Fund tenancy support programs, which have proven to be effective early intervention measures, to help people maintain tenancies rather than falling into homelessness
- Increase access to and maintenance of private rental tenancies by extending brokerage programs across the state

Mental Health

- Fully fund a Victorian recovery oriented community mental health system for those who don't meet NDIS criteria

Justice

- Increase the capacity of pre-release programs so that all prisoners have a chance to address the causes of their offending and plan for their exit into the community

Youth

- Increase TAFE and other alternative education options with fundamental skills and work experience for homeless and at-risk young people who have disengaged from the education system and adult learners
- Increase flexible brokerage funds for private rental and education for young people who have not been in the care of the state but have similar needs

Public Transport

- Implement free off-peak public transport to all health care card holders, increasing mobility and reducing disincentives currently faced by vulnerable Victorians

Conclusion

This submission has focussed on solutions that 'level the playing field' for Victoria's most vulnerable and disadvantaged citizens: young people leaving state care; people exiting prison; and highly marginalised people with complex needs. At the time when they need our help the most, the services currently available to these groups are too few and too inadequately resourced. It is here that the gaps in our social safety nets are too large; where we have failed to live up to our own standards that offer everyone in our community a fair go.

It is time we acknowledged this failure, as policy makers, politicians, bureaucrats and community service workers, and the costs it has created for individuals, families, communities and the state. If we can close these critical gaps in our service system, the flow on benefits for the rest of the social services system and the Victorian community will be enormous.

We want to see a future where youth homelessness is halved and adult homelessness is reduced by a quarter because young people in care do not become homeless anymore; where people are not shunted from hospital to prison to the streets and back again. We want to live in a community where if you are put in prison you have a second chance at life once you get out and hundreds of millions of dollars from the prison budget go to schools and hospitals instead.

These three initiatives will not fix all the problems in our state. But they are good first steps towards a better system. If we can get these three things right, we can free up money that is locked into crisis responses and put it to better use funding initiatives that prevent disadvantage.

Every year the state budget gives the Victorian Government a chance to make a statement about what sort of society we, as Victorians, want to live in and lead us towards that vision. That vision can be reached by making incremental but significant changes to our systems and continuously improving them based on what we know works. We call on the Victorian Government to commit to funding the initiatives outlined in this document and make our communities a better place to live.



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The Victoria Social Programme and Policy Unit (VSPPU) was established to support and resource Salvation Army services and leadership in Victoria by coordinating our response to state-wide policy issues and advocacy. Part of the VSPPU's role is to act as a central access point through which government departments, Ministers and other stakeholders are able to be directed to the appropriate people and services within The Salvation Army in Victoria. In addition, we actively participate in advocacy and policy development through written submission, social justice campaigns and collaboration with other CSO policy units and peak bodies.

For more information regarding the VSPPU or The Salvation Army in Victoria, please contact The Salvation Army Victoria Social Programme and Policy Unit (VSPPU) on 9353 5200.

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All names and identifying details used in this document have been changed. Photos do not relate to individuals in case studies.



