

WOMEN AND HOMELESSNESS: INNOVATIVE PRACTICE AND EXIT PATHWAYSⁱ

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Introduction

The face of women now appears as a significant feature of the 'new homelessness'. According to the Wesley Mission report the 'faces of homelessness' have changed significantly over the last two decades:

'The old, derelict wino on the park bench has been joined by younger men, unemployed and hopeless; by the confused and mentally ill, frightened by the pace of activity surrounding them; by women and children, desperate to escape violent and destructive domestic situations; by young people, cast off by families who can't cope or don't care' (Hoogland, 2001).

This paper reports on recently completed research on women's transitions out of homelessness and the role of housing and associated support services in offering 'independence'. This paper will provide an overview of the research and the outcomes in the final report.

The research sought to answer the following questions:

- a. What kinds of housing and support services do homeless women utilize?
- b. How does access to housing and associated support services affect women's transitions out of homelessness?
- c. How do different forms of housing provision and associated support services affect women's transitions out of homelessness?

The research project was funded by the Commonwealth Office of the Status of Women (OSW), who sought to further its evidence based policy development through examination of the 'exit pathways' for women from homelessnessii.

Project Methodology

The project was undertaken in three discrete stages. These are outlined below:

1. **Systematic Literature Review**
 - International scope (UK, USA, Canada, New Zealand and Australia)
 - What is known about women's transitions out of homelessness by age, ethnicity and location
2. **Policy Review**
 - International scope (UK, USA, Canada, New Zealand and Australia)
 - Focus on policies that relate to social determinants of women's health and well being, in particular the role of housing
3. **Review of Innovative Practice.**
 - Primary data collection with peak organisations
 - Mapping current housing and associated support service options available to women to transition out of homelessness
 - A range of examples of innovative practice:
 - Othila's Young Women's Housing and Support Services
 - Cooloola Community Housing Association
 - Hanover Welfare Services
 - Lou's Place

Women in the 'New Homelessness'

The emergence of women within the 'new homelessness' is result of women facing increased risk and precariousness of their social life. Broader structural changes have precipitated homelessness, such as deregulation of the labour market and the reduction of welfare for the most vulnerable (Forrest, 1999; Wearing, 1996). This increase in 'manufactured uncertainty' may be beyond the capacity of many individuals to manage.

Globalisation in the late 20th and early 21st centuries has had an impact, specifically on economic policy and deregulation of the labour market (Casey, 2002). The mass of the population faces a marked increase in risk, precariousness and individualisation, a risk intensified by a reduced commitment of governments to welfare assistance (Kennett & Marsh, 1999: p6). External effects have precipitated social changes creating a state of 'manufactured uncertainty' beyond the capacities of some individuals to manage (Giddens, 1996). For example, those without social and economic buffers against uncertainty in this 'risk society' are open to the effects of fluctuations of the employment market. A consequent flow-on effect can threaten securities of housing, family and social relationships (Beck, 1992; Winter and Stone, 1999). The outcome of a mix of complex systematic issues beyond the control of many individuals can thus precipitate events that eventually result in homelessness. Housing researchers have recognised that global trends have significantly underscored the increasingly complex experiences of homelessness. Forrest, for example, sees the 'new homelessness' emerge in relation to changing labour market structures and opportunities, reduction of welfare for the most vulnerable, leading to the production and identification of new risk groups. A variety of structural changes impinge upon homelessness, experienced by individuals as marginalisation and exclusion, and the extension of risk that goes 'beyond those groups traditionally vulnerable' (Forrest, 1999: p22).

In addition to the complex structural, individualistic and definitional issues outlined above, the complexity of relationships noted also requires an adaptation of the responses to 'new homelessness' to account for the particular position of women. While the ideology of the traditional nuclear family model persists in spite of changing demographic trends, Watson (2001) argues that homelessness is defined in terms of men's experiences and practices or men's subjectivities hides women's homelessness. Fifty-five percent of homeless people seeking assistance in 1999 in Australia, for instance, were women (Casey, 2002).

The faces of women now appear as a significant feature of 'new homelessness'. One feature of the systematic changes occurring at the structural level has been the creation of a new position for women as 'welfare clients' that highlights an increasing feminisation of poverty and the policies and politics of women's needs (Wearing, 1996). Responses to women's increased vulnerability require recognition of the changes in household structures such as changed family forms, changed gender relations and changed age and generational structures, that all play a part in the complexities resulting from wider changes and an uncertain economic climate. In the context of broad structural change, Watson (2001) argues that increased attention should be given to 'the processes through which progressive exposure to risk and an accumulation of problems eventually deplete a household's or individual's resources and precipitates them into homelessness'. Loss of a home for women raises a range of complex issues. These are not just the loss of security in a material sense of shelter, but also a loss in the subjective context of being able to manage independence apart from the material security of home. Loss in this deeper subjective sense of security is also related to the abandonment of networks with significant others within the home, and within the outside community. Subjective issues of security can be significantly related to wider sets of secure relationships within a spatial locality.

Given Watson's (2001) emphasis on the complex combination of factors precipitating homelessness, it is important to locate the causes of women's homelessness in a model that provides for the systematic study of the 'full set' of factors that may be considered in identifying exit pathways from homelessness for women. In a model specifically oriented to understanding housing access, Sullivan (1994) describes the resources (including gender, age, income, employment and social contacts) that social actors bring to the housing system and the 'macro level' variables (including policy, market and culture) that form the context of housing decision-making and access. The model can be adapted to illuminate the relationships producing and addressing homelessness as follows:

Socio-demographic variables operating at positional and dispositional levels:	Field of Human Services	Field of Housing
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Structural (age, ethnicity, location) • Individual (experiences, abilities, resources) • Community (social capital) • Household access to support and resources at a household level) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Policies, programs and services influencing housing access and outcomes • This involves specific definitions and benchmarks pertaining to homelessness based on policy settings 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Home ownership • Private rental • Public housing • Community housing • Crisis and transitional housing

Each column in the above table designates key ‘macro-level’ elements potentially implicated in the production and amelioration of homelessness, understood as a particular state of access to the field of housing in column three. The first of these, socio-demographic variables operating at both positional and dispositional levels, refers to the domain of factors associated with social background. Thus, those seeking housing may be disadvantaged by age, sex, family status, class, income, wealth, education, access to information, that effectively underpin interactions and negotiations that may help to promote housing access (Sullivan, 1994). With specific reference to key issues associated with housing access, it is important to acknowledge the critical role of the relationship between objective background factors and subjective, perceptual and dispositional factors that impact on the way in which social actors negotiate housing options. For example, a key factor in actors’ capacities to negotiate and make choices in complex social environments, such as housing, is ontological security. This concept is employed as a means of understanding the importance of managing social and psychic hazards and ‘maintaining reasonable levels of order and stability in our personalities and in society’ (Beck, Giddens & Lash, 1994). Thus ontological security could be seen as a critical dispositional factor associated with attaining access to housing, resulting from a set of material conditions – economic, educational, experiential etc.

The third column in the table, titled ‘the field of housing’, indicates the context in which social agents use the resources identified in column one to gain access to housing. As indicated in the table, this field is comprised of the range of possibilities with respect to housing access in terms of tenure. This access is directly related to agents’ possession and capacity to apply the resources designated in column one. It should be noted that the nature of this field will vary depending on national variations in housing provision – for example, the relative weight given to public housing, private rental and home ownership in national housing policy. Homelessness is thus understood as a particular state of access to this field, influenced by the resources outlined in column one, but also by the dynamics of the housing field itself, depending on the particular nature of housing provision in any given country.

The second column, titled ‘the field of human services’, refers to the policies, programs and services that mediate between the resources outlined in column one and the possibilities of access to the housing field in column three. This locates the logic of homelessness policy as an intervention in the relationship between the variables in column one and outcomes in column three. Various policies and programs can thus be understood as addressing specific combinations of positional and dispositional variables as well as the nature of housing provision in the field of housing. Transitions out of homelessness for women, then, can be understood in terms of the way in which services in this field identify and respond to the specific factors associated with housing access as outlined above - positional, dispositional and housing provision factors. This model provides for an analysis of extant work on causes of homelessness in terms of the variables identified as producing homelessness.

Causes and Reasons for Women’s Homelessness

While lack of income is cited as the primary underlying reason for falling into homelessness in Australia, the Council for Homeless Persons additionally identifies a range of predisposing factors. They include the interaction between housing related problems and others such as: violence (particularly domestic violence), unemployment (particularly long-term), illness (including mental illness), drug and alcohol abuse, disability, family breakdown, and a loss of social support networks (<http://www.chpa.org.au/general.html>). Current international conceptualisations of the causes of homelessness support the notion of an interaction between structural or macro-level, and individual or micro-level factors as underpinning all forms of homelessness (Fitzpatrick, Kemp & Klinker, 2000).

The main structural factors that have been the focus of Australian homelessness research are age, location, ethnicity and family status. Research suggests that a significant number of homeless women are under 25 years of age. Clearly, age affects a woman’s ability to exist independently, gain access to income, and negotiate housing and associated support fields. Additionally, urban versus rural locations affect housing availability and access, and appropriateness of service responses. Women from Indigenous backgrounds are over-represented in SAAP service usage, which serves to highlight the importance of viewing notions of the home and the family within cultural contexts. Women from Non English Speaking Backgrounds (NESB) have low involvement in mainstream services which also suggests the importance of cultural inclusivity in service provision. In summary, what has become evident over the last decade, as demand for services has increased, is the change in client profiles of the homeless. The Council for Homeless Persons (1999) suggests that these changes include a younger average age of clients, more families, more females (women and children escaping domestic violence and single women), a greater incidence of drug dependent clients approaching SAAP and new patterns of frail aged persons entering homelessness for the first time.

Jerome et al. (2002, pp.52-55) the ‘causes’ of women’s homelessness are difficult to determine with exactitude, and these are often the experiences or abilities of the individual which precipitate housing instability. These individual factors include experiences and abilities, with the experience of violence, either in childhood or adulthood, as a major contributing factor. Casey (1999) found the main reasons for women’s homelessness were domestic violence, relationship breakdown, financial difficulties, eviction or ending accommodation. These factors were compounded by links to women’s lower level of labour force participation, lower levels of income, interrupted working life, familial responsibilities, and discrimination limiting their access to finance (Casey, 2002). SAAP data suggests that for adult women, the experience of domestic violence is the main precipitator into homelessness. Women themselves are reluctant, in many instances, to cite the reasons that precipitated homelessness. For instance, young women may not disclose that sexual abuse is a primary factor in their homelessness to SAAP funded agencies. Sexual abuse, is however,

recognised as a major contributing reason for young women's homelessness, supported by studies, such as that conducted in South East Queensland by the Queensland Homeless Fund (1992), that found 88.5 percent of young homeless women had experienced sexual abuse. Often women are also reluctant to label experiences of abuse in relationships as domestic violence, citing relationship difficulties or substance abuse as the presenting reason. Othila's Young Women's Housing and Support Service also points to the diversity of reasons that affect women's homelessness, including the high levels of domestic violence and substance misuse that occurs in Indigenous communities, and impacts on the lives of young Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women and their families. In addition they claim that a range of reasons influence young women to leave home:

'... including family conflict, violence and abuse, unplanned pregnancy, a desire to be independent and severe economic hardship within the family. These are REASONS young women leave home, they are not the CAUSES of homelessness. Young Women are homeless because of a lack of safe, secure and affordable housing options' (Othila's, 2002 interview).

The way in which pathways into women's homelessness is discussed, in particular the distinction between causes and reasons, can be illuminated by the housing access model outlined above. While experiences of domestic, sexual or family violence may be identified as 'primary causes' of homelessness, the table above allows us to identify them as a particular type of individual experiential variable outlined in column one and the nature of these factors in conjunction with other relevant positional and dispositional factors listed in column two and the nature of housing provision itself (identified by Othila's above) as designated in column three. For example, in addition to the individual experiential factors that may ultimately precipitate a woman into homelessness, intervention in ongoing issues associated with structural factors such as income and age, dispositional variables such as ontological security, and housing provision may be critical factors in providing for transitions out of homelessness. The differentiation between the factors implicated in pathways into and out of homelessness draws attention to the experience of homelessness itself as an important factor to be considered in transitions out of women's homelessness. The following section discusses this and its implications for women's housing access.

Women's Experience of Homelessness and Housing Access

Women's experiences of homelessness in the 'risk society' are compounded by factors identified by Young (1990), such as powerlessness, violence, cultural imperialism, marginalisation and exploitation. Violence (as physical and psychological experiences within the home), is a precipitating element of women's homelessness. As reported by the Council for Homeless Persons, many women and children from all socio-economic levels risk becoming homeless if they lack independent financial resources when escaping a violent home. Violence in the public spaces of cities, dominated by homeless men, also contributes to hiding the increasing numbers of homeless women (Watson 2001). In her study of pathways into and out of homelessness, Casey (2002) discovered that long term and chronically homeless women 'slept alone and for reasons of safety in places where they would not be found'. This is one of the elements that reduces the visibility and thus knowledge of the full extent of women's homelessness. Sue Casey's study also reveals important delineations of women's homelessness: chronic homelessness, long-term homelessness and situational homelessness. These finer delineations are important to understanding the complexity of issues that require consideration in providing for transitions out of homelessness.

Chronic homelessness, according to Casey, is the experience of women who have been homeless since childhood, consistent with youth homelessness, with little experience of home as adults. The experiences of such women demonstrate various histories of neglect, state care, itinerant living, and therefore a lack of education, work opportunities, and practical skills necessary to maintain a home.

Casey found in common with Brown and Ziefert (1990) that typical of chronically homeless women was a survivalist orientation that impeded the establishment of long-term goals. Long-term homelessness explained the situations of women who had previously maintained independent homes or rooms. Their pathways into homelessness were precipitated by crisis events and psychological problems that increased the risk of homelessness significantly. These women appeared to enter into a downward spiral, resulting in primary homelessness or psychiatric admissions before actual homelessness occurred. Situational homelessness was experienced by women who were capable of maintaining a home, but who became homeless as a result of a specific crisis, loss of a job, or economic reasons that forced them to access accommodation support services (Casey, 2002).

In a background paper for women's housing policy, Timcke (2001) draws attention to some key issues specific to women. These include factors such as choice, safety, accessibility of income, and access to community infrastructure. Government moves away from structural analyses of poverty and inequality towards individualised client focused responses has resulted in a loss of gender specific information (Hughes, 1999). The experiences of 'new homelessness' then, occur on what Watson (2001) calls 'gendered terrain in which women's housing needs and experiences remain marginalised'. These kinds of observations reaffirm the necessity for developing an approach that understands the complexity of linkages between women and their experiences of homelessness, as chronic, long-term or situational, and a consideration of these relationships in accomplishing successful exit pathways out of homelessness. In terms of the housing access model outlined in Figure 1, the nature of homelessness itself points to different experience and implicates different capacities and dispositions that will impact on a woman's ability to negotiate the field of housing.

The conceptual model and discussion above provide a framework for understanding 'successful' or 'unsuccessful' transitions out of homelessness in terms of the complex combination of factors in column one and column three focused on in Human Service interventions. There are, however, some additional requirements for assessing or proposing interventions aimed at women's successful pathways out of homelessness. While an account of the field of human services outlines the function of services for homeless women in terms of a housing access model, it is also important to conceptualise the nature of this service provision in terms of 'innovation'. This requires consideration of social and cultural changes that form the context of contemporary intervention in transitions out of women's homelessness.

Identifying 'Innovation'

The research found that there were 'three' strands to innovative practice both overseas and in Australia. Innovative human services strategies are those that:

- d. Respond to the complexity of the socio-demographics of the 'new homeless' including 'new homeless' women, particularly in view of changing labour market and family structures;
- e. Take into account the 'conditions of access' to the housing field and the social contexts of different women in the design and implementation of capacity building strategies; and
- f. Respond with diversified and integrated strategies that acknowledge changing roles of market, state and family/community in the management of social risks of homelessness.

Essentially, innovative responses are those that are based on an understanding of the complexity of factors that produce or impede housing access for women, and are applied in a way that is cognisant of the changing context of women's homelessness and processes of social risk management.

The paper will now turn to examples of innovative practice in Australia, drawing on four case studies of services that are considered to be innovative.

Innovative Practice: Case Study Selection

There are several examples of innovative practice in Australia. They include Othila's Young Women's Housing and Support Service, particularly their SWISH, (Single Women's Integrated Support & Housing) program, Cooloola Community Housing Association, Hanover Welfare Service and Lou's Place¹. These sites provide opportunities to further examine the relationships identified in the conceptual model and to identify key variables that enable successful exit pathways out of homelessness and to 'independence'.

Othila's Young Women's Housing and Support Service	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Women under 25, homeless or at risk of homelessness• Brisbane metropolitan area• Short-term counselling, short-term accommodation• Group activities, women and their children• Information and referral• Link to Single Women's Integrated Support and Housing (SWISH) program• Funded through SAAP
Cooloola Community Housing Association	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Gympie, in rural location• Long-term housing, for young women (16-23) with children• Design through extensive tenant consultation• Close ties with support organisations• Emphasises feedback, evaluation, research• 1999 National Award for Excellence in Community Housing
Hanover Welfare Services	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Melbourne• Range of traditional & crisis accommodation• Single women without dependent children, all ages• Highlight early intervention• Plus counselling, recreation• Private funding• Extensive infrastructure
Lou's Place	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Sydney, auspiced by Mission Australia• Range of human service provision, no accommodation• Supportive environment for homeless and disadvantaged women, all ages• Capacity building• Incl. women with mental and other health problems

Interviews were held with key staff from the four services and analysed using the conceptual framework to identify innovative practice. Examples of innovative practice in these services is discussed below.

Responding to 'New Homelessness'

All the services interviewed indicated that they were responding in differing ways to issues of women and the 'new homelessness'. This included:

- Identifying refugee and language barriers as a particular kind of disadvantage with respect to maintaining successful housing. This points to mechanisms where these 'structural factors' impact directly on a woman's capacity to negotiate the private rental market. It is important to note that refugees are now a group that have also been identified as constituting a 'new homeless' group (Phillips, 2000).
- Emphasising the importance of family/household and community supports, and their role in housing access through the provision of informal support. Resources such as friendships and the capacity to make and maintain them are identified as significant.
- Exposing the ongoing role of abusive relationships in homelessness, but also in housing access where the domestic situation continually fails to provide the safety necessary to 'address the issues'. This includes the additional insight that when this is combined with a specific age group, it exacerbates housing access issues.
- Identifying the mechanisms through which mental illness impacts on the capacity of women to access and maintain housing.

This review of the 'logics of housing access' as observed by the workers at the case study services indicates a clear need for responsiveness to women in terms of the issues producing 'new homelessness'. They point to the need for everyday supports in the form of friendships or other familial, household and community supports that serve to maintain a capacity to access housing. A number of the responses also saw these as specifically combined with structural characteristics such as age in considering housing access mechanisms. It could be argued that even in extracts one and six where these kinds of supports were not identified specifically, both comments paint a picture of women enduring the problems of lack of knowledge, of language barriers and mental illness without necessary supports. While only one service explicitly identified security and safety as a critical mechanism that may assist in housing access, it is highly probable that this would be a feature of all of the situations depicted above.

The means through which these material circumstances are seen to maintain access to the field of housing is worthy of further exploration. The concept of ontological security is employed as a means of understanding the importance of managing social and psychic hazards and 'maintaining reasonable levels of order and stability in our personalities and in society' (Beck, Giddens & Lash, 1994). In the context of the current study, ontological security refers to feelings of personal control which engender the stability and safety necessary for self-confidence and well-being. It could be argued that security as confidence and well-being is not an end in itself, but enables people to negotiate and make choices in complex social environments.

Saunders (1990) describes how the home facilitates habit, constancy, and the protection and safety necessary for the maintenance of self-identity. Similarly Dupuis and Thorns point to characteristics of 'home' that are associated with ontological security: home as the site of constancy in the social and material environment; home as a spatial context in which the day-to-day routines of human existence are performed; home as a site free from the surveillance that is part of the contemporary world which allows for a sense of control that is missing in other locales; and home as a secure base around which identities are constructed (Dupuis and Thorns, 1998: p43). Just as these studies identify a relationship between material circumstances and dispositions and competences that enable negotiation of specific fields, the interventions offered by the case study services also note a link between current circumstances, 'security' and ability to access and maintain housing. Lou's place serves as an important example of a service oriented to maintaining a level of ontological

security and thus attending to an important condition of housing access. Lou's place is seen by clients as having 'home like' qualities even though the service does not provide its own accommodation. Offering food, washing, sewing, money management and other assistance, it provides some of the basic material and emotional supports involved in maintaining ontological security. This appears to be critical for maintaining the possibility of transitions out of homelessness, and for supporting the transition process.

The provision of these services facilitates the security and stability necessary to negotiate different phases of homelessness. It assists clients in finding a 'bed for the night'. As the comments in extract seven indicate, this provides for clients' capacity to 'see beyond' an event or circumstance that has precipitated homelessness to broader issues associated with 'what they are doing with their life'. Extract eight points to the 'home like' qualities of Lou's place seen as critical in maintaining the security required for negotiating transitions out of homelessness. These reflect the kinds of characteristics identified as important dimensions of ontological security by Dupuis and Thorns: safety, constancy, and a secure base around which identities are constructed (Dupuis and Thorns, 1998). The different ways in which the provision of support required for ontological security has an ongoing role in maintaining women in specific housing tenures. It is clear that provision of everyday services such as sewing facilities and financial management would assist in maintaining tenancies in a material sense, but it is also highly likely that the subjective factors associated with supportive relationships and social connections play an important part. Another key factor to which the case study services responded was the role of location in facilitating or impeding exit pathways out of women's homelessness.

The material and subjective dimensions related to locality are also important factors to be considered. Aspects of security linked to locality underscore the complexities of making successful exits out of homelessness. Several examples from the selected case studies demonstrate this quite markedly. In the following extracts, both the structural changes impinging on the availability of preferred housing options in specific locations, and subjective dimensions of attachment to a particular location play a part in the likelihood of successful, or unsuccessful, exits out of homelessness. While provision of a house might be thought to be a substantial means of successfully exiting homelessness, a locality in which to 'feel at home' seems to be equally, if not more, significant. Feeling at home in the city, as a location, was the experience of a number of women. The service workers in Lou's Place and Hanover commented upon similar examples that linked women's feelings of security to a street community. These instances draw attention to the destabilising effects of removing people from a familiar locality: 'Relocation away from the city centre increases isolation. In a different locality a lack of trust makes for easy options, using 'needs-based' friends, with no risk of being hurt'.

This kind of destabilising effect was considered by the workers to be especially significant for people with mental health issues, where loss of a secure home locality can result in increased instability and vulnerability. Redevelopment of specific parts of cities produces a scarcity of housing for homeless people. This in turn creates more likelihood of relocating women away from places where they feel at home and have support networks. As mentioned in the Wesley Mission's report on the Faces of Homelessness, the impact of the Sydney Olympics (Hooglard, 2001) on the housing rental market in that city has resulted in many families and individuals living under the poverty line, either in housing stress or in impoverished living conditions. The pool of affordable housing decreases, and roving homeless families are then on the increase. This kind of enforced mobility reported by McCaughey (1991) produces a sense of isolation through loss of significant links to a particular locality. These reported examples point to the sense of security experienced by women in the city. Relocation away from a place where they feel they 'belong' - where they have networks of friends, and access to support services - can be instrumental in their reentry into homelessness.

Capacity Building

The case study services provided information on the substantive contexts in which capacity building strategies were applied. These included clients' lack of confidence in approaching government departments over issues such as bond loan debts and priority housing, access to information about various housing tenures and options, financial skills and budgeting and tenancy database listings. In these contexts, the interviewees identified the critical competencies and attitudes that clients required in order to negotiate and maintain access to housing. Clients needed to be proactive in contacting and communicating with government departments and landlords. In order to overcome the social problems that precipitated homelessness, clients needed to reflect on and learn from previous experiences. They needed to develop specific knowledge and skills, for example, in financial management. They also needed to develop the capacity to adapt to change. These specific capacity building strategies, however, needed to occur in the context of broader approaches to increasing women's confidence, sense of support and self worth.

One of the services recommended the need for holistic counselling approach to maintain a self of self-worth, not one focused on individual problems and issues. Another service pointed to the need for emotional support aimed at clients' fear of success. In this respect, capacity building ideally occurred at both a substantive and an emotional level.

Integration of Market, Family and State

The third key aspect of innovative practice pertains to the ways in which services acknowledge and integrate the respective roles of market, family/community and state in the management of homelessness interventions. The case study services outlined a number of different approaches and contexts for innovative collaboration. In a regional context, the Cooloola service described service linkages with St Vincent de Paul, Centrelink, Department of Families and Social Workers at the local hospital. Further the linkages were negotiated in a way which was sensitive to the wishes and circumstances of the tenant. This service also identified ways in which they facilitated clients' links with the private rental market through assistance with such things as references.

Conclusion

In identifying successful pathways out of women's homelessness, it is essential to understand women's homelessness and housing access issues in the context of 'new homelessness'. It has been argued that the changing face of homelessness reflects changes in the underlying societal structure that have precipitated homelessness. These include the impacts of new economic policies, deregulation of the labour market, and a general increase in the risk and precariousness of social life. This 'manufactured uncertainty' is beyond the capacity of many individuals to manage. In addition to this the shape of families and households has altered. As a result, gender, age and generational relationships have changed and women have become more vulnerable. New risk groups have emerged, including those now identified as significant components of the homeless.

These changed relationships can be expressed as the structural, individual, community and household components of a model for understanding and addressing women's homelessness. An understanding of these variables and their interrelationships is critical to a proper understanding of the factors that might precipitate women into homelessness. It is also critical to understanding the ways that women's homelessness can be addressed. Homelessness is addressed through a range of policies, programs and services. Government, the private market, the community and households are all players in this. In turn, women can exit homelessness into a variety of housing types and tenures, including crisis and transitional housing. This model linking variables, services and housing formed the basis for understanding the national and international experiences of service

providers addressing women's homelessness. Because of the complexity of the connections amongst these factors, and because of the variety of precipitating influences implicated in women's homelessness, responses need to be flexible and adaptable to particular needs and circumstances. The complexity of the range of potential responses can best be managed by identifying and encouraging innovation. In this context, innovation refers to approaches that

- a. Are cognizant of the fact that the 'new homelessness' requires new approaches to social risk management;
- b. Emphasise innovative approaches to capacity building for clients; and
- c. Offer diversified but integrated strategies that acknowledge the relationships amongst the market, government and the family/community that impact on pathways out of homelessness.

The policy context for innovation needs to recognise changes that are occurring in family and household conditions, an increased emphasis on individual capacities in negotiating housing markets, and a changing division of labour amongst the family, the market and government in the management of social risk.

The combination of material and subjective factors that are important in housing access include:

- Capacity building strategies that engage with substantive issues in housing access as well as emotional requirements involved in negotiating and maintaining housing; and
- A strategic approach to the ideas of market, state and family in integrating the management of social risk.

Many of the findings of the research apply to a generic level. Others can be specifically linked to the factors of innovation, namely responsiveness, capacity building and integration. Successful transitions out of homelessness seem to be associated with services that are appropriately targeted to the real needs of identified segments of the population of homeless women and utilise an effective mix of government, private sector and family/community resources. Lack of success seems to be associated with inappropriate targeting and a poor mix of resources. But focussed targeting needs to occur within an environment of holistic non-specific support.

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ii A full copy of the report is available at <http://www.ahuri.edu.au/publish/page.cfm?contentID=20>