



Review of Australia's First Open Government National Action Plan 2016-2018 in Relation to Homelessness.

Acknowledgments

The following submission was developed by an undergraduate project investigating the causes of homelessness. The project incidentally researched the issues homeless people face when it comes to civil duties

We acknowledge and pay our respects to the Kurna people, the traditional custodians whose ancestral lands we gather on. We acknowledge the deep feelings of attachment and relationship of the Kurna people to country and we respect and value their past, present and ongoing connection to the land and cultural beliefs.

Information contained in this report that is from external sources has been acknowledged appropriately. Information that is not acknowledged, is considered as open source material but the authors of this report request fair attribution be applied to this material if included in other research and/or publications.

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Issues affecting Homeless people relating to commitments 4.1 and 5.2

Policy and Social Issues

While Australia does allow those of whom are experiencing homelessness to vote, there stand a few potential reasons as to why the homeless may not enrol to vote. The requirement to state the last place of permanent residence, may not be a strategically viable option for those homeless people who are fleeing domestic violence and do not want to be associated with their abuser or provide any information to their abusers (who can in theory, view the electoral role, if they choose to do so). There is also the issue that many homeless people may not be aware of the electoral division that they are residing in, due to more pressing concerns of safety and welfare. Both reasons are likely to leave homeless people disconnected from the electoral system and the political parties running candidates in their division^[1]. Such a disconnection and lack of participation prevents those of whom are homeless from voting to secure their interests in elections and disadvantages them in the broader society. Resulting in homeless people having to rely on the voting public to secure their interest, which is not always likely to happen.

The issue of not receiving welfare payments also disconnects homeless people from their right to participate in both electoral processes and shaping policy. Not having an income to procure shelter, food and the necessities to survive adequately takes up enough of a homeless person's time and interests, leaving them with little energy to participate in shaping policy that will secure their interests. And while, the Department of Human Services does have a section on the Centrelink website titled Accommodation, Renting and homelessness, there is no information provided on what resources there are to help homeless people beyond a link to Homelessness Australia. Which itself functions as an intermediary to other service provid-

ers^[2, 3]. This is woefully inadequate, while it is estimated that up to 95% of homeless people have a mobile phone with internet access, not being able to afford credit restricts access to these online services, producing a form of digital marginalization^[4]. This delays the process of securing welfare and thereby income and acts as a roadblock to homeless people's right to participate in the policy shaping process.

Economic issues

The confidence of homeless people in the Electoral System and Political Parties is most likely reasonably low, and justifiably so. This comes from the fact that homeless peoples' confidence in programs to help homeless people and homelessness prevention services, is reasonably low. This can be seen, in part, from the decreased funding for programs such as the National Affordable Housing Agreement and increases in incidents of homelessness. With an approximate \$300 million net decrease from 2011 – 2016 in funding taking place^[5], while homelessness has increased by 13.7% or approximately 14,000 persons over the same time span according to national estimates by the Australian Bureau of Statistics^[6]. As studies show, most of those of whom are homeless at present have been so in the past, and most have been homeless as children (aged under 18). Indicating that while services may temporarily alleviate homelessness for people, it is a recurring problem that the current structures that address the issue are not capable of handling.

This indicates a lack of supply of resources needed to address homelessness effectively. Part of this can be seen by the 'core group' of homeless people

in Adelaide's park lands who have given up on services to house them and now refuse such services^[7].

This is also evidenced by the fact that as of 2016, the proportion of homeless people with an unmet demand for accommodation assistance services was 30.2%, while 3.9% of the total demand for other services went unmet^[8]. 30.2% being approximately 1 in 3 people, this signifies a significant inability of supply or the efficiency of supply of specialist homelessness services, according to basic economic theory. The lack of supply or inefficiency of supply is likely to be a contributing factor to homeless people's low confidence in government and governments ability to address their concerns; and by proxy a lack of faith and confidence in the electoral system and political parties.

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