Workforce Training for the Homelessness Sector

Swinburne University of Technology

National Homelessness Research Agenda 2009–2013

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Year 2013  **Project title:** Workforce Training for the Homelessness Sector

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**KEYWORDS:** training, education, homelessness, workforce

**OBJECTIVES:**

The overall aim is to identify the training/professional development requirements of the homelessness sector. The research questions are:

1. What are the current training context and professional development offerings for the homelessness workforce?
2. Is there specialist training or competencies required for particular parts of the sector?
3. What are the implications for workforce training of the current organisational, educational and homelessness reforms?
4. How successful have been existing professional development programs in building better knowledge and skill levels in the sector?
5. Where does the sector itself see the gaps in professional development?
6. Why has the tertiary sector not developed accredited professional development courses for the sector, and what has to be overcome to confront this issue?
7. How is contemporary homelessness research best fed into the tertiary education sector and in-house professional development programs of Human Service Departments?
Non-Technical Summary:
This study examines how we can improve the education and training provided to the Australian Homelessness sector. This research was supported by the Australian Government through the National Homelessness Research Agenda of the Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs. The project builds on the study *Developing an Effective Homelessness Workforce* (Martin et al, 2012) and seeks to answer the following research questions:

1. What are the current training context and professional development offerings for the homelessness workforce?
2. Is there specialist training or competencies required for particular parts of the sector?
3. What are the implications for workforce training of the current organisational, educational and homelessness reforms?
4. How successful have existing professional development programs been in building better knowledge and skill levels in the sector?
5. Where does the sector itself see the gaps in professional development?
6. Why has the tertiary sector not developed accredited professional development courses for the sector, and what has to be overcome to confront this issue?
7. How is contemporary homelessness research best fed into the tertiary education sector and in house professional development programs of Human Service Departments?

Research was carried out in three case study states: Victoria, New South Wales and Queensland.

In the first stage of the research, a review of existing training and educational opportunities was undertaken. These opportunities were evaluated in relation to the changing nature of homelessness organisational and program reforms, as well as to the educational sector. This involved identifying the various types of teaching and professional development programs available, interviewing the deliverers of training, and interviewing workers and management in the sector to gain their views on the appropriateness of education and training and where there might be gaps. In addition, a survey of workers was undertaken to get a broader understanding of their views on existing training and education practices, and where they felt the gaps might be.

The second stage of analysis looked at the impediments to more appropriate training and education and the actions needed to address these.

Our findings confirm that, as stated in the White Paper on Homelessness (FaHCSIA, 2008), staff development of this workforce is a problem. We found that staff members do hold
qualifications, but they are not the right ones to fully enable them to effectively carry out their current and projected roles.

Furthermore, the right qualifications do not exist at the moment; there is a need for new homelessness and housing qualifications to be developed at different educational levels and with adequate options for specialist client group study options. Relevant stakeholders must be enabled to influence the curricula of these courses, and the courses must be adaptable and dynamic to meet changing needs.

We recommend that designated funding is needed for workforce education and training within the National Partnership Agreement on Homelessness (including the provision of staff cover to enable study time), and incentives are needed for both organisations and staff members to actively participate in training and education. Study methods must be flexible enough to allow staff in all areas of the country to participate.
### List of abbreviations

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<th>Abbreviation</th>
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<tr>
<td>AHURI</td>
<td>Australian Housing and Urban Research Institute</td>
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<tr>
<td>AiHW</td>
<td>Australian Institute of Health and Welfare</td>
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<td>AQF</td>
<td>Australian Qualification Foundation</td>
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<td>CHFV</td>
<td>Community Housing Federation of Victoria</td>
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<td>COAG</td>
<td>Council of Australian Governments</td>
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<td>FaHCSIA</td>
<td>Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Aboriginal Affairs</td>
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<td>NGO</td>
<td>non-government organisation</td>
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<td>NPAH</td>
<td>National Partnership Agreement on Homelessness</td>
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<td>RTO</td>
<td>registered training organisation</td>
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<td>SAA Act</td>
<td><em>Supported Accommodation Assistance Act 1994 (Cth)</em></td>
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<td>SAAP</td>
<td>Supported Accommodation Assistance Program</td>
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<td>SACS</td>
<td>social and community services</td>
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<td>SUHREC</td>
<td>Swinburne University Human Research Ethics Committee</td>
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<tr>
<td>TAFE</td>
<td>technical and further education</td>
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<td>VET</td>
<td>vocational education and training</td>
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1 Introduction

This research was supported by the Australian Government through the National Homelessness Research Agenda of the Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs (FaHCSIA). The overall aim of this project was to identify the training and professional development requirements of the homelessness sector.

The project builds on the study Developing an Effective Homelessness Workforce (Martin et al, 2012) and can also be seen a complement to the recent or emergent Community and homelessness workforce reviews being undertaken by some states. Martin et al (2012) provided the first accurate picture of the national homelessness workforce and identified future workforce challenges for the sector. Their report identified that there were about 11,600 people working across Australia in specialist homelessness jobs; that over three-quarters of homelessness workers are women, and half are in full-time, permanent jobs; that nearly 60 per cent of frontline (non-managerial) homelessness workers have less than five years’ experience in the sector; and that the workforce holds quite high formal qualifications, i.e. nearly 40 per cent have university degrees and fewer than 10 per cent have no post-school qualifications. Moreover, workers’ qualifications are generally in areas appropriate to homelessness work, such as community work, social work, psychology, counselling or youth work. However, while ongoing education and training levels are quite high, training is not always as targeted as stakeholders would like (Martin et al, 2012).

Despite being a relatively small component of the wider welfare and community sector, homelessness is a sector at the coalface of the most intense areas of need. The 2012 Australian Community Sector Survey: National Report, for example, found that for Australians experiencing poverty and disadvantage, the availability of secure and affordable housing and care and treatment for mental illness were reported as the two greatest areas of need. (ACOSS, 2012). Both of these areas intersect directly with the homelessness sector, with both mental illness and the lack of secure and affordable housing being key areas for which the homelessness workforce has to negotiate solutions. This alone provides a sufficient rationale for ensuring that homelessness workers have the most appropriate training for their roles, but there are other reasons. These include the fact that the sector is a highly dynamic one, with the nature of need changing over time; for example, the current rate of family homelessness is much greater than in the past (Hulse and Spinney, 2010). Policy and program environments are constantly evolving and adapting in response to changing need, but also to changing ideas and ideology about the best methods of service delivery. This requires training and education to be equally dynamic and flexible. The homelessness sector has recruitment and retention difficulties in the face of better paid employment areas and the challenging nature of the work. Training and education can play a role in creating workforce satisfaction, reward and recognition in a way that can assist in addressing these problems.
An appropriately skilled workforce is central to effective responses to homelessness and to successful implementation of national homelessness policy and service-delivery reforms (Martin et al, 2012):

The current policy interest in homelessness workforce issues is underpinned by the proposition that achieving the objectives of national homelessness reforms requires new approaches to service delivery and therefore a workforce with different and higher level skills. The new policy directions represent a significant shift in homelessness policy away from a previous focus on crisis and transitional homelessness services that aimed to ameliorate the plight of the homeless. Instead, the aims now are to prevent homelessness where possible and to intervene actively to permanently end homelessness. The new skill sets needed to support these new approaches and emerging service models include an ability to work assertively with clients experiencing high and complex needs and collaboratively across disciplines and fields.

(Martin et al, 2012, p. 2)

Until recently there has been limited existing research on the homelessness workforce in Australia. Until Martin et al published their report in 2012, the most substantial research on the Australian homelessness workforce was undertaken for the Victorian Department of Human Services in 2007 (KPMG 2008). This project focused on the ‘community-managed housing and support workforce’, which the authors categorised as including three ‘sub-sectors’, one of which is the ‘homelessness workforce’. The other two sub-sectors are the ‘community housing’ and ‘family violence’ workforces (Martin et al, 2012). Whilst this categorisation has some merits, this differentiation is not used in this report; the evolving face of homelessness support and housing services means that such differentiation is becoming less valid. As we move towards an understanding of contemporary homelessness in Australia involving structural housing issues, rather than solely issues of welfare, we begin to see a blurring of the homelessness and social housing sectors.

The research questions
The research questions which this project seeks to answer are:

1. What are the current training context and professional development offerings for the homelessness workforce?
2. Is there specialist training or competencies required for particular parts of the sector?
3. What are the implications for workforce training of the current organisational, educational and homelessness reforms?
4. How successful have existing professional development programs been in building better knowledge and skill levels in the sector?
5. Where does the sector itself see the gaps in professional development?
6. Why has the tertiary sector not developed accredited professional development courses for the sector, and what has to be overcome to confront this issue?
7. How is contemporary homelessness research best fed into the tertiary education sector and in house professional development programs of Human Service Departments?

Research was carried out in three case study states: Victoria, New South Wales and Queensland.

The following chapter covers the contextual matters pertinent to this study, including the Homeless White Paper, the National Partnership Agreement on Homelessness, the draft Homelessness Bill and theoretical perspectives on the causes and solutions of homelessness. Such a context is important for discussions around education and training, because it is important that education and training opportunities reflect the changing context, expose workers to the implications for workforce practices and provide an understanding of clients and the organisational settings in which homelessness services are delivered. The review in this chapter is followed by consideration of the types of organisations carrying out specialist homelessness services, and the people who are their clients.

2 Contextual matters

2.1 Introduction
The purpose of this chapter is to put into context the theoretical and policy issues driving reforms to the homelessness sector and to discuss the nature of homelessness services and their clients.

2.2 The homelessness White Paper The Road Home
The Federal Government’s White Paper, The Road Home (FaHCSIA, 2008) instigated a substantial increase in funding to combat homelessness, and brought about a new emphasis on addressing the causes of homelessness and providing a framework for preventing homelessness from occurring. The paper’s specific objectives included increased support for victims of domestic violence to stay safely in their own homes, improved tenancy advice and support services, and a policy of ‘no exits into homelessness’ from such places as hospitals, mental health and drug and alcohol services and statutory care. These new priorities of tackling the causes of homelessness and preventing homelessness from occurring (rather than dealing with it once it has occurred) require new skills for those working in these parts of the homelessness workforce. Many, including Martin et al (2012), consider that these are new and different kinds of work to the more traditional provision of support within emergency and transitional housing. For example, the New South Wales Mount druitt
Staying Home Leaving Violence Scheme for women wishing to stay in their own home following the removal of a violent partner stresses that it is NOT a homelessness service. The scheme’s management describes their work as consisting mostly of assessing the risk and liability related to the victim of the domestic and family violence remaining in their home; creating a safety plan; carrying out ongoing case work, court support and advocacy; and referring to other specialist agencies (Spinney, 2012). These issues are pertinent to the professional development needs of the Australian homelessness workforce, and they are further discussed later in this report.

Interestingly, although The Road Home identified low-skilled staff as a significant workforce concern in the homelessness sector, this was not the finding of Martin et al (2012) in their 2012 research on the Australian homelessness workforce. They found that:

_The workforce is quite well qualified, with only about 10 per cent having no post-school qualifications, and most having qualifications in areas that are relevant to their work. Workers rarely feel that they lack the skills needed for their jobs, and employers do not generally think that a large proportion of their workforce is under-skilled. Skill concerns appear to be more focused around problems of developing the skills that experience in the sector provides for the many workers who are new to it, and developing the high-level skills required for clients with complex needs._

(Martin et al, 2012, p. xii)

Although there is some discrepancy between these two analyses of the present situation, there is agreement that workforce development of high-level skills, such as case management for clients with complex needs, does require further work. These matters are further dealt with in chapters five and six, which discuss our research findings on the further training and education needs of the homelessness workforce.

This research project has come about because developing the skills and competencies of the homelessness workforce was specifically identified in The Road Home (FaHCSIA, 2008) as a national priority for improving specialist homelessness services and achieving sustainable housing outcomes for people with high and complex needs. Improving education and training for the homelessness workforce is one of the ways in which the Government hopes to meet its ambitious targets to reduce homelessness. The White Paper also advocated the development of ‘advanced practitioners’ within specialist homelessness organisations, and an accreditation system for funded homelessness services which includes a focus on improving education and training and career pathways (FaHCSIA, 2008, pp. 40–41). These matters are further discussed in chapter six.

2.3 The National Partnership Agreement on Homelessness

In November 2012 the Australian and state and territory governments agreed to enter into negotiations for a new long-term National Partnership Agreement on Homelessness (NPAH),
as the original four-year agreement was due to expire at the end of June 2013. At the time of writing this process was still ongoing, and in the meantime a one-year transitional partnership agreement for 2013–14 was in place. Following on from the White Paper on Homelessness in 2008, the first NPAH in 2009 also identified improvements in service response to homelessness as a priority issue, and ‘workforce development and career progression for workers in homelessness services’ as an agreed output (COAG, 2009).

Since then, a discussion paper was released (in February 2010) on a national quality framework to support quality services for people experiencing homelessness, with the development of a ‘competent, trained and qualified workforce’ as one of the core principles underlying the framework (Housing Ministers’ Conference, 2010). Together these documents exhibit a powerful discourse concerning reform of education and training available to the homelessness sector.

2.4 The draft Homelessness Bill 2012
In the White Paper on homelessness, The Road Home, the Government outlined its desire to introduce new homelessness legislation to ensure that people who are homeless receive quality services and adequate support. Although the draft Bill, which was released in 2012, does not specifically discuss development of the homelessness workforce, it is worth mentioning here because the anticipated new legislation will replace the Supported Accommodation Assistance Act 1994 (Cth) (the SAA Act). The first iteration of that legislation was in 1985 and since then it has guided the Commonwealth’s response to homelessness in Australia, including acting as the vehicle for providing funding to states and territories to administer the Supported Accommodation Assistance Program (SAAP). This was replaced in 2009 by the NPAH.

The Homelessness Bill 2012, in its present draft, seeks to preserve some features of the SAA Act, which recognised people who are homeless as one of the most powerless and marginalised groups in society. The SAA Act made it clear that support should be provided in a way that respects people’s dignity as individuals, enhances their self-esteem, is sensitive to their social and economic circumstances and shows respect for their cultural backgrounds and their beliefs (FaHCSA, 2012).

The draft Bill confirms the Commonwealth Government’s aspiration that all Australians have access to adequate housing and sets out the strategies and service delivery principles necessary to achieve this. However, it is important to note that the Commonwealth has no express power to legislate on homelessness, and therefore the draft Bill does not create any rights or obligations regarding homelessness. We need to bear the impact of federal governing arrangements in mind when discussing the future development of the Australian workforce. Although it is likely that a new NPAH will be agreed upon by the states and territories and the Commonwealth government, and it may well contain agreed targets for developing the homelessness workforce, it will also need to take into account the differing
priorities that the various states and territories have for these matters, in particular the workforce development aspect of reducing homelessness. Indeed, the outcome of the 2013 federal election may also impact on the priority given to future development of the homelessness workforce as a mechanism for reducing the number of homeless people in Australia.

2.5 Who makes up the homelessness workforce?
Martin et al (2012) estimated that in 2011 there were approximately 11 600 people employed across Australia in directly providing or managing homelessness services, and that these were the full-time equivalent of 7 500 workers. Homelessness services providers also employ workers who provided other, non-homelessness services, plus administrators. Martin et al (2012) estimated that including such workers, homelessness services employed approximately 23 000 workers in total nationally. This is a relatively small figure, and an important one for our discussions in chapters five and six on the current and future provision of homelessness sector development education and training and the ways in which future needs can be met. The Australian specialist homelessness workforce is smaller than the aged-care and disability workforces, and similar in size to the child-protection workforce (Martin et al, 2012). The Martin report, however, excludes in its assessment the 10 000 or so employees in the public and community housing sector, which through targeting of allocations has largely become the permanent housing point for the homeless. Many of the staff in this sector now grapple with the problems of understanding the needs of the homeless and managing people’s housing outcomes to prevent them dropping back into homelessness.

Martin et al (2012) also found that, as in most community service sectors, the Australian homelessness workforce is mainly female, with women comprising over three-quarters (77 per cent) of workers and managers. The workforce is also relatively middle-aged, with more than half aged 30–50 and only 20 per cent aged under 30. Some 7 per cent of the homelessness workforce is Indigenous Australians, a much higher proportion than the 1 per cent in the wider female workforce. Most of these are workers, rather than professionals or managers (Martin et al, 2012). When considering how to effectively develop the homelessness workforce, it is important that we take into account this profile of the workforce and how it is likely to look in the future. Training and educational opportunities must be provided in ways which are culturally appropriate, and which are flexible enough to suit workers who may also have other responsibilities and care commitments.

The geographical dispersion of the workforce is a key point that is not made clear when focusing on employee numbers alone. The 11 000 homelessness workers and the 10 000 or so social housing workers (the de facto homelessness workers) are spread across Australia. Though the majority work in large cities, a good proportion of the workforce is in regional areas. This means two important things: access to education and training is limited even in
urban areas, and the spatial spread means the numbers in each service may be very small, making it difficult for staff to take time to participate in professional development.

2.6 What work does the specialist homelessness workforce do?
In their analysis, Martin et al (2012) divided those working in the homelessness sector into three groups: non-professional (those carrying out residential support work, for example), professional (those conducting such work as outreach, social work and counselling) and managerial. They found that 43 per cent were employed as professionals and about the same percentage as non-professional. Managers made up 14 per cent of the workforce (Martin et al, 2012). Over 60 per cent of the professional workers were doing social and outreach types of work, and nearly 80 per cent of the managers had permanent full-time contracts. This is useful information when starting to consider how unmet workforce development needs could be met. If most workers are employed on a long-term basis, it makes sense to motivate them to stay with their employers and to invest in allowing them to do the best possible work. Martin et al (2012) found that many homelessness workers do not stay working in the sector for a long time. If professional development opportunities encourage workers to stay in their roles longer, employers will in turn be more motivated to fund development and education opportunities.

People recruited to work in the homelessness sector come from a variety of previous employment situations. Martin et al (2012) established that only about a third have previously worked as carers or welfare workers in other community sectors. Workers therefore come to the homelessness sector with a variety of skills but, importantly in terms of professional development, may have no specific knowledge of housing and homelessness issues. Most specialist homelessness services are operated by not-for-profit organisations. These can vary from small, local organisations to agencies working nationally, and even internationally.

Homelessness workers work with those applying for, and staying in, both crisis and transitional accommodation. Some clients need help to access long-term accommodation in the private rental or public housing sectors, or to return to their own homes. Others will receive outreach support and be provided with information and have referrals made on their behalf without ever being accommodated.

2.7 Who are the clients of specialist homelessness services?
The Specialist Homeless Collection data collected by the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW) found that 102 356 clients were assisted by specialist homelessness services between January and March 2012, and that the majority (59 per cent) of these were female, with the remaining 41 per cent male. Children featured largely in these figures, with 17 per cent of the clients aged under ten years. The single largest reason (24 per cent) for seeking assistance was domestic and family violence, and 31 per cent of families seeking assistance were single parents with children. A third of all female clients, and 9 per cent of males, cited
domestic and family violence as the reason they needed help. In line with this figure, 31 per cent of all applicants said that they needed emergency accommodation (although this was actually provided for only 65 per cent of those requesting emergency help) (AIHW, 2012).

We know that many of these clients will be repeat users of emergency accommodation services. Research carried out by Spinney, also supported by the Australian Government through FaHCSIA’s National Homelessness Research Agenda, found that 30–50 per cent of women and children using a domestic and family violence refuge do so more than once, and that there are numerous structural and individual reasons for this. Developing an understanding of these reasons and creating policy to help prevent the need to reuse emergency accommodation are fundamental ways that development of the homelessness workforce can assist with reaching the White Paper on Homelessness’ targets for homelessness reduction in Australia.

Specialist homelessness services deal with a wide array of client groups; people who have become homeless for very different reasons and who have very different support needs. As a result, those working in the homelessness sector have widely diverse roles. Services can range, for example, from providing crisis support for rough sleepers with mental health problems to providing homelessness prevention advice for professional women who are owner-occupiers and have experienced domestic and family violence. These are very different sorts of work which require different skills and aptitudes. This presents an important issue regarding the professional development of the workforce: to what extent should training, education and learning be generic (about homelessness and housing issues generally), and to what extent should it assist in developing specialist knowledge for workers whose focus is a particular client group?

The future development needs of the homelessness workforce will also vary around the country. People experiencing homelessness are disproportionately represented in inner urban areas, and this is where most homelessness staff are required. However, rural and remote specialist homelessness service staff also need to be able to access professional development opportunities if they are to keep up to date with best practice and new ideas. Where homelessness staff are required is also determined by the varying rates of homelessness across the country. The Northern Territory has the highest rate, followed by Western Australia and Queensland. New South Wales and Victoria have the lowest rates (Chamberlain and MacKenzie, 2008). A relatively small national workforce, split up to work with very different client groups, is widely dispersed across Australia. In addition to these factors are cultural issues; for example, Indigenous Australians comprise 14 per cent of the homeless population, a much higher proportion than that within the general Australian population.

There is a strong correlation between homelessness and poverty in Australia; Chamberlain and MacKenzie (2008) established that almost 83 per cent of homeless people receive
government benefit payments. These are people who, because of their poverty, find it almost impossible to compete in the very tight Australian housing market. Some of them are also subject to other factors which make them vulnerable to homelessness, but some would be capable of sorting out their own housing situation if given assistance with their financial difficulties.

The main causal factors for people who were clients of SAAP services in Australia at the 2006 census were:

- domestic and family violence: 23 per cent (38 per cent for women)
- financial difficulty: 11 per cent (20 per cent for single men and 18 per cent for families)
- relationship or family breakdown: 12 per cent
- eviction: 10 per cent (27 per cent for families, but only 8 per cent for young single people).

Of these:

- the average age of females was 30, and males 32
- 22 per cent were aged under 20
- 25 per cent of clients were households with children.

(Chamberlain and MacKenzie, 2008)

These figures represent people who had been able to gain assistance from SAAP services on the census night. Many more had not been able to become homelessness services clients, either because the type of services they required was not available due to oversubscription or because no suitable services existed in their location. People who were living rough, in caravans, sharing, or in other forms of unsupported accommodation were not counted at all. We cannot, therefore, only use these figures to establish what future workforce development needs will be. Consideration also needs to be given to needs that are currently unmet and needs that will develop in the future.

Workforce development alone cannot solve Australia’s homelessness crisis; homelessness services only deal with an issue once it has occurred. Dealing with the causal factors of homelessness has the potential for greater impact on reducing the number of homeless people in Australia. What effective workforce development can do, however, is ensure that workers have the correct knowledge and skills to deal with current housing and homelessness issues. Increasingly, this means that homelessness workers need not only welfare skills but also knowledge of the Australian housing market. Without this they cannot maximise their clients’ opportunities to access longer-term accommodation.
We know that the people most likely to experience homelessness in Australia are those from the following backgrounds, and/or who have one or more of the following causal links to homelessness:

- Indigenous Australians
- People experiencing domestic and family violence
- Young people
- Families
- Children living with care-givers
- Elderly people
- Older single women
- People experiencing poverty
- People with complex needs, such as mental health issues and/or drug and alcohol issues
- Single people

2.8 Why do people become homeless in Australia?
Both in Australia and internationally, researchers have made use of a diverse range of theoretical approaches in attempts to understand the nature of homelessness, the experience of homelessness and the barriers to moving out of homelessness (Anderson, 2003).

Academics who have looked at theories concerning homelessness argue that the subject has been under-theorised in the past. Neale (1997) posits that homelessness has been described too simplistically, as either a housing or a welfare problem, and that there has traditionally been an under-theorising and simplification of the definitions and causes of homelessness. The consequences of this are that debate on the causes of homelessness has suffered from a lack of conceptual and theoretical clarity. Clapham (2002) concurs with the view that much housing research has lacked a theoretical background.

In the past, homeless people have often been classified as either deserving or undeserving, and the causes of homelessness have been seen as either structural (where homelessness is caused by social or economic factors rather than the actions of the person), or individual (where the person is at least partly to blame for their homelessness). Fitzpatrick (2005) confirms that a developing understanding of homelessness has led to a shift from individual towards structural explanations of the causes of homelessness.

Significantly, the work of researchers such as Neale (1997) built on the approach of Watson and Austerberry (1996), who maintain that homelessness is a continuum rather than an administrative category. Neale takes a post-structuralist approach, theorising that there is no single oppressive force, but several which affect people’s likelihood of not being able to secure their own housing. Furthermore, in Neale’s view, individuals can effect changes to
these institutional forces and may also have a range of personal characteristics (such as gender, race, age, marital status, class, health, employment and previous housing history) which are likely to increase their personal likelihood of becoming homeless. Neale (1997) clarifies that in seeking to define homelessness and its causes, it must be noted that universal truths about homeless people do not exist, and that differences between homeless people are multiple, although they may well share common experiences of homelessness. As a result there will be no single solution to homelessness. Instead, a range of support and housing mechanisms are needed in order to meet the diverse needs of homeless people. In relation to this report, Neale’s post-structuralist approach was useful in developing thought on the workforce development needs of the Australian homelessness sector.

Parker and Fopp (2004) also attempt to integrate structural and individual theories about the causes of homelessness. They clarify that structural factors create the conditions within which homelessness will occur, but that people with personal problems are more vulnerable to these adverse social and economic trends than others. Adkins et al (2003) propose that three critical components can lead to a tendency towards homelessness: structural, individual and community/household socio-demographic variables. We concur with the literature reflecting that part of understanding homelessness is about recognising that it is a multidimensional situation shaped by a complex set of multiple risk factors. We also agree that homeless people on different homelessness pathways have different ways of dealing with homelessness being so stigmatised in our society, and that this is part of the reason why some people remain homeless for longer than others (Chamberlain and Johnson, 2013).

2.9 Homelessness as a social construct
This section looks at the debates about whether homelessness can be considered as a social construct.

Watson and Austerberry (1986), and Hutson and Liddiard (1994) were amongst the first to identify that homelessness as a ‘historically and culturally specific concept’ (Watson and Austerberry, 1986, p. 10). Chamberlain and MacKenzie (1992) also contend that homelessness is a socially constructed cultural concept that only makes sense in a particular community at a given time. They suggest that before deciding if somebody is homeless, it is necessary to identify shared community standards about the minimum housing that people have the right to expect in order to live according to the conventions and expectations of a particular culture. According to Chamberlain and MacKenzie, the cultural definition of homelessness leads to the identification of three segments of the homeless population. The primary homeless are those who are living on the streets or in deserted buildings, cars or improvised dwellings. Secondary homeless people move between various forms of temporary shelter, including staying with friends and relatives or in emergency
accommodation and boarding houses. The tertiary homeless live in single rooms in private boarding houses on a long-term basis (usually three months or more) and are without their own bathroom, kitchen or security of tenure. They are homeless because their accommodation does not have the characteristics identified within the minimum community standard.

Jacobs (1999) argues that the struggle by groups with different vested interests to impose a particular definition of homelessness on the policy agenda is critical to the way in which homelessness is treated as a social problem. Jacobs outlines the struggle between proponents of two major ideological perspectives: homelessness as a structural problem requiring broad welfare measures, versus homelessness as caused by individual fecklessness and irresponsibility.

The constructivist perspective sees social problems as formed by the power of identifiable groups in society to define a certain issue as a problem that needs tackling in a particular way. This allows questioning about why policy issues and proposed solutions can differ. This applies to consideration of the education and training needs of the Australian homelessness workforce.

Clapham (2002) puts forward a framework of homelessness that is based on social constructionism. He proposes that:

Language is capable of building up zones of meaning that serve as a stock of knowledge that individuals use in everyday life and which can be transmitted from generation to generation.

(Clapham, 2002, p. 61)

Fitzpatrick (2005) disagrees that homelessness can be defined as a social construct: ‘Homelessness, on the other hand is not a cultural phenomenon but rather a signifier of objective material and social conditions’ (Fitzpatrick, 2005, p. 12). This stance can be questioned, however, by considering how the Indigenous population in Australia clearly has a different concept of home from that held by Australians of, for example, European extraction. Indigenous homelessness is considered a multidimensional concept, which is very different from non-Aboriginal homelessness in its form, nature, and visibility (Roberts, 2004). Although there are shared meanings with respect to being at risk of homelessness, or of having no shelter at all, for Indigenous Australians a home can be defined as wherever a family member extends emotional or physical sustenance.

Whether one believes homelessness is essentially a problem experienced by, and caused by, the characteristics of the individual (a ‘blaming the victim’ explanation) or is a social problem caused by changes in the wider structures of society (a structural explanation) leads to differing policy approaches. Policy which focuses on the former tends to be shorter
in funding, characterised by services largely targeted at changing behaviours of the homeless, and more ad hoc in its approach. Policy built around a structural explanation tends to be better funded, more comprehensive and targeted at the processes creating homelessness.

The vast changes in the Australian homeless population over the last few decades have been commonly associated with major structural changes to both the economy and the welfare state. These include changes in the population structure, a growing scarcity of housing, increased levels of unemployment, changes in welfare and psychiatric services, and changing social values. Homelessness workers need to be aware of and understand these changes in order to best serve their clients’ needs.

2.10 The links between specialist homelessness agencies and social housing – changing roles and housing environments
The changes in the homeless population have led to new roles for people working in the homelessness sector. At the same time there has been a move away from traditional tenancy services in some public housing authorities, including the Victorian Department of Human Services in Victoria, partly as a result of the cohort of formally homelessness people in need of greater support, whom they now predominantly house. There is also a growing move away from specialist housing staff to generalist human services workers within the public sector. This is partly based on the incidence of high-needs clients who receive multiple services from human service departments in addition to being allocated public housing. It remains to be seen how well this will serve the needs of formally homeless people now housed permanently in public housing.

Most of the housing in Australia is owner-occupied. Social housing (public and community housing) makes up only 3 per cent of our housing stock. Growth of the community housing sector is projected, partly through stock transfers from public housing, and the releasing of equity from the stock that will then be possible to use to build and purchase additional social housing. This is likely to mean that staff are more likely to change employers, and that there will be a need for a collective commitment to up-skilling workers, and for arrangements between employers to pay the education and training fees incurred by staff who move between homelessness or social housing organisations. Such systems of national agreement have operated successfully in other countries, including the UK. This matter is further discussed in Chapter Six.

2.11 What types of organisations provide the special homelessness services program?
Australian homelessness specialist services tend to be relatively small organisations, with over two-thirds employing ten or fewer workers, and less than 10 per cent employing more than 20 (Martin et al, 2012). Martin et al (2012) found that most (87 per cent) continue to provide the traditional crisis and short- or medium-term accommodation and support, such
as that provided in domestic and family violence refuges and youth and single-adult shelters. However, they increasingly provide a range of other additional services, including outreach support, community education and social marketing, counselling, financial confidence-building and placing people in motels and caravans as short-term accommodation rather than solely providing direct accommodation services. These require different sorts of skills than the direct provision of crisis accommodation. Most homelessness agencies are not-for-profit organisations with most of their funding from government, which means that the NPAH is in a position to be highly influential regarding standards and expectations for the education and training development of the homelessness workforce. In their survey, Martin et al (2012) established that most staff are in permanent full-time employment, although a third of the non-professional workers were on casual contracts (Martin et al, 2012). This has implications for the development of the homelessness workforce; it is difficult to motivate staff to develop their skills and knowledge if they have no job security. Workers need to see and understand a reason to develop their skills and knowledge, and to be motivated to remain in the sector once this development has occurred. Whilst it is likely that the national wage case for non-government organisation (NGO) workers will encourage more qualified workers to both remain in and enter the sector, this need to be coupled with job security and career pathways if good workers are to remain in this relatively small workforce.

However, if we include social housing agencies (both public and community housing organisations) in the homelessness workforce, the organisational context is different. The state and territory housing agencies are very large organisations and some of the community agencies are moving in the same direction. Moreover, while some of the homelessness service agencies are small, they are sometimes part of larger not-for-profit organisations that provide a range of the other human services, such as The Salvation Army. This raises a number of issues in terms of training and education, as workers may not always be employed in or see their employment as within only the homelessness component of a larger organisation. Moreover, it suggests the need for an understanding of what it means to work in a larger organisation with a range of role and objectives.

3 Research methodology
This chapter explains the multi-method qualitative methodology used to conduct this research, which consisted of a literature review, mapping exercises, a survey of homelessness sector workers and interviews with relevant participants. These were designed to seek answers to the following research questions:

1. What are the current training context and professional development offerings for the homelessness workforce?
2. Are specialist training or competencies required for particular parts of the sector?
3. What are the implications for workforce training of the current organisational, educational and homelessness reforms?
4. How successful have existing professional development programs been in building better knowledge and skill levels in the sector?
5. Where does the sector itself see the gaps in professional development?
6. Why has the tertiary sector not developed accredited professional development courses for the sector, and what has to be overcome to confront this issue?
7. How is contemporary homelessness research best fed into the tertiary education sector and in-house professional development programs of human services departments?

The project was led by Dr Angela Spinney and Professor Terry Burke, who convene and lecture on the suite of postgraduate housing courses at Swinburne University of Technology. Dr Spinney has recently completed a Graduate Certificate in Learning and Teaching, which included research into the opportunities and challenges of part-time study for full-time workers in the homelessness and housing sectors. The results of that study have been incorporated into the current research where appropriate. The interviews were conducted in the main by Dr Andrea Sharam and centred on the case-study areas of Victoria, New South Wales and Queensland. A review of the literature concerning training, education, workforce development and theories of homelessness and of the homelessness sector were conducted by the named researchers, and by Mr Mike Pelling of the Swinburne Institute for Social Research. References to the relevant literature have been included throughout this report as appropriate.

In the first stage of the research, a review of existing training and educational opportunities was undertaken. These opportunities were evaluated in relation to the changing nature of homelessness organisational and program reforms, as well as to the educational sector. This involved identifying the various types of teaching and professional development programs available, interviewing the deliverers of training, and interviewing workers and management in the sector to gain their views on the appropriateness of education and training and where there might be gaps. In addition, a survey of workers was undertaken to get a broader understanding of their views on existing training and education practices, and where they felt the gaps might be.

The interviews with staff revealed their views on the relevance of the training and education they had received. This included asking whether their youth work, community development, social work qualifications, etc. provided adequate training for working in the homelessness sector.

Analysing the reforms to the homelessness system and the related implications for training allowed us to consider the future development needs of the workforce, and to assess what
impact developing the workforce through education and training might have on the success of the system reforms.

Our analysis of the educational reforms included a review of the Bradley report and interviews with a sample of university and technical and further education (TAFE) providers. It allowed us to think about how educational providers will be able to fill gaps in education and training in the future.

At the 7th National Homelessness Conference held in Melbourne in September 2012, we ran a workshop on the training and education needs of the homelessness workforce with 175 homelessness sector workers. Discussions centred on how well people thought their training and education had equipped them for their roles in the homelessness sector, whether they felt there were any gaps in their professional development, and how they would like these gaps to be filled in terms of mode of delivery, etc. Delegates were also invited to take part in the survey of the homelessness sector conducted for this research.

An article entitled What are the Professional Development Needs of the Homelessness Workforce? published in the Council to Homelessness Persons journal for the homelessness sector, Parity, in September 2012 explained the research and invited readers to contribute (Spinney and Burke, 2012). In all, 34 survey forms were completed by homelessness sector staff.

A total of 22 interviews were conducted with specialist homelessness services managers, representatives of relevant peak bodies, state government officers, education and training providers and service agency providers.

The second stage of analysis looked at the impediments to more appropriate training and education and the actions needed to address these.

The information statement is included at Appendix One and the participant consent form is included at Appendix Two. The project was approved in August 2012 by Swinburne University’s Human Research Ethics Committee (SUHREC) in line with the National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research.

4 Training and education currently provided for the specialist homelessness sector

4.1 Introduction
This chapter considers the types of education, training and development opportunities currently available to staff and potential staff in the Australian homelessness sector. Here we examine both the qualifications and knowledge currently available from formal education, and the skills development and competency and expertise-raising available from
specific training opportunities (Blundell et al, 1999) and establish how and why the available education and training opportunities meet the needs of the sector.

4.2 What is workforce development?
Professional development is the major mechanism for an industry or sector to acquire the knowledge that can improve skill levels and decision-making. For the homelessness sector such development has been a problem. This is due to the historical fragmentation of homeless providers, which (as discussed in chapter two) are often small-scale community providers. TAFEs and universities have also not, up to now, provided professional training that is specific to the homelessness sector. This is likely because of the relatively small numbers working in the specialist homelessness sector across very dispersed geographical locations.

4.3 The difference between education and training
Training can be distinguished from formal school and post-school qualifications (which are viewed as education), and is generally defined in terms of courses designed to help individuals develop skills of use in their job (Blundell et al, 1999). Education can therefore be viewed as the process of attaining formal qualifications which are used to demonstrate a specific level of knowledge and learning ability to employers or educators. The ‘cognitive development’ acquired from education, such as rational thinking, conceptual skills and organising principles, is an important part of education (Barrie and Wayne Pace, 1998). Blundell et al (1999) maintain that the aim of education is to develop ‘breadth of perspective’, to provide if you like the ‘helicopter view’ that aids understanding. Conversely, training can be considered the process of skills development specifically related to a person’s employment – it can narrow the focus, rather than broaden understanding. As discussed below, both education and training are necessary to ensure an effectively developed workforce. Indeed, there are three human capital components which we consider relevant to the development and effectiveness of the Australian homelessness workforce. These are an individual’s own ability, the qualifications and knowledge they gain from formal education and the skills, competency and the expertise that they gain from specific training (Blundell et al, 1999).

4.4 Reforms to the educational sector
In recent times there have been a series of reforms to the educational sector, which have led both to an opening up of student numbers and to a need for courses to pay their way economically. Prospective students seeking to enrol in courses that are a sideways development in their education rather than a higher qualification than that previously obtained have been met by large tuition costs. In Victoria, TAFE courses have been hit by recent reductions in funding from the Victorian Government. These factors provide both challenges and opportunities for finding ways in which the educational sector can effectively assist with the development of the homelessness sector within Australia, and heighten the
importance of devising dedicated funding mechanisms which do not affect either individual students’ finances or their employing organisations’ budgets for providing homelessness services.

### 4.5 Who currently provides training and education to the homelessness sector?

Our research across the three jurisdictions established that training for the homelessness workforce comes from a fairly wide variety of sources. These include in-house training and that organised by peak bodies and private providers. The training available ranges from non-accredited short courses (some as short as half a day) to longer in-house programs such as those Hanover Housing Services provides for its staff. Training can be formal or informal, such as staff shadowing and mentoring opportunities.

Educational opportunities are provided mostly through TAFEs and universities. These provide accredited certificates, diplomas, degrees and postgraduate qualifications, but our research established that at present they provide very little education that is specifically about homelessness, although there have been important initiatives in this area. Costs for education and training vary from free of charge at point of delivery to several thousand dollars for students or their sponsoring employers.

Many within the workforce have a social work or youth studies degree or certificate (Martin et al, 2012). The issue is that these formal courses do not contain much learning and teaching about homelessness, or about the housing issues that cause homelessness. Workers with these qualifications have learnt much about the welfare issues concerned with working in the homelessness sector; however, there are not fully taught about the structural as well as agency reasons why people become homeless. Nor do many of these courses include subjects on organisations and organisational management, even though all employees have to work in some form of organisation, and many in large organisations. A senior manager in the Victorian Department of Human Services expressed his concern that many of the direct delivery workers had no knowledge of the financial and policy constraints on an organisation, why the organisation did things in a certain why and what skills and knowledge were required to progress within such an organisation.

Our findings established that there are two main areas that employers concentrate on when considering training and education opportunities for their staff: new workers and management skills.

### 4.6 Training and education for new workers

The TAFE Certificate Four in Community Services qualification was mostly considered sufficient for entry-level homelessness service case workers by the majority of interviewees, and the practical skills of the education provided at this level were most valued by employers. However, a TAFE Level Five Diploma is often sought from those applying for higher positions such as coordinator or team leader. Interestingly, some of the educators
interviewed for this project indicated that they considered their students not always ready for these advanced roles.

Understandably, given the lack of homelessness education available, the level of homelessness and housing knowledge of new staff is often low, particularly as most of the Certificate Four in Community Services syllabus examined for this research from the case-study states only offer a single ‘Introduction to homelessness’ unit as an elective for study, if at all. Interviewees suggested that the Certificate Four in Community Services does not allow staff to learn enough about the structural causes of homelessness, as the study units which are available tend to concentrate teaching on the individual/agency approaches to homelessness discussed in chapter two. This does not allow students to gain a rounded perspective on the causes of and solutions to homelessness in present-day Australia.

In some states there is a TAFE Certificate Four and/or Diploma in Social Housing, which includes some homelessness content. Interviewees revealed that few new workers undertake the TAFE Certificate Four or Diploma in Social Housing, although some employers encourage their staff to go on to study for this qualification later. In our view there may be more uptake in the sector if there was an equivalent or parallel course with ‘homelessness’ explicit in the title.

Degree-level courses in community service areas also generally do not cover homelessness in any depth or as a specialisation option. This was regarded as a major deficiency by interviewees from within the specialist homelessness services sector, who described the need for homelessness to be available as a core subject in community and social housing qualifications, whether at TAFE or university level. Perhaps because of this, experiential learning was considered at least as important as formal education and training by many of the employers interviewed.

Interviewees reported that training tends to be provided on an ad hoc basis, depending partly on when it becomes available through providers such as peak bodies, and partly on when it is needed.

4.7 Experiential learning through student placement

Many agencies representatives interviewed regard student placements as credible work experience; indeed, many regarded student placements as a key recruitment strategy, especially for the third of the workforce who are casual staff, and whom employers can ‘trial’ before employing on long-term contracts. Interviewees stated that students who have taken part in placements with homelessness agencies have a high likelihood of being offered work. Because of the placements’ value as a recruitment mechanism, smaller agencies sometimes felt disadvantaged by their incapacity to take students on placements.

However, some TAFE courses were offered as a result of specific funding from government homelessness programs, and consequently were only available to staff already working
within the sector, rather than to students who are prospective workers (Swinburne TAFE’s Level Four in Social Housing is an example). Private registered training organisations (RTOs) are less likely to offer work placements than other education and training providers that have active linking strategies with the specialist homelessness sector.

4.8 Skills development for those in leadership, management and governance roles within specialist homelessness services

Our research revealed that many managers inadvertently go into leadership and management roles without any qualifications or training, but that they are highly desirous of them, and feel the need for them. Training and education available for community managers includes diplomas and postgraduate qualifications, intensive leadership workshops, and assessable and non-assessable training. Some said that whilst training and education for staff in these roles is not yet receiving as much attention as case work training for entry-level workers, for instance, they feel that the issue is increasingly being addressed by the sector. For example, there is a growing uptake of participation in the TAFE Certificate Four in Frontline Management and other relevant courses. Senior managers are increasingly studying for graduate diplomas or master’s degrees in policy and related fields, but rarely do such courses offer any subjects on homelessness or housing management. These courses are only available to managers who can access the few universities that offer them. For managers who do business management courses, the problem is that such programs are often weak in teaching content for the not-for-profit sector and the human services sector more generally.

4.9 Views on the competency of education and training providers

Victorian interviewees reported that changes to TAFE funding have caused some difficulties in retaining and recruiting teachers for the homelessness unit of the Level Four TAFE qualification. Other education providers reported that although there are many very experienced practitioners available, very few of them have valid teaching and learning or training qualifications. This is likely to impinge on their ability to teach and train effectively. Furthermore, some who teach on these courses do not have any specific knowledge and experience in the homelessness and housing sectors. They are teaching from pre-prepared materials but without a lot of knowledge behind them.

Education providers stated that students who have previously been homeless themselves make up a sizable cohort of the student population studying topics related to homelessness. They considered the courses not appropriate for some of the enrolled students (citing as reasons the students’ personal trauma, and instances of inflexibility or rigid thinking), but education providers were not able to vet employer-sponsored students prior to their enrolment.
4.10 Training provided by peak bodies
In New South Wales and Victoria, much of the specialist homelessness services staff training is provided by relevant peak bodies.

The New South Wales Federation of Housing Associations has RTO status and offers TAFE-level social housing qualifications. It has also developed a non-assessable training unit for small homelessness agencies who are landlords. This is probably the most homelessness-focused program in Australia, but it has a housing focus rather than a service provision focus. Apart from this, there is very little specialist homelessness training available in New South Wales.

The Community Housing Federation of Victoria (CHFV) provides a more extensive, adaptable and flexible non-assessable training calendar for those at entry and advanced levels, and provides management and governance training. The programs offered are, however, about much more than homelessness and while the programs are valued by CHFV members, not least because the training provided is closely tied-in with sector needs identified by members, there is not a lot for homelessness service providers in their offerings. The programs are also relatively expensive because CHFV has to undertake full cost recovery of courses. CHFV consequently does not believe it has the ability to provide regional courses without subsidy at present.

Wodonga Institute of TAFE runs a specialist homelessness sector training calendar in conjunction with the Victorian Department of Human Services. Short courses (normally one or two days in length) deliver training in such things as introduction to homelessness, collaboration and communication skills, trauma, crisis management, working with children and supervision skills. Wodonga TAFE is the key provider of training to the homelessness sector in Victoria.

Queensland also offered a TAFE community services program including homelessness-specific components, but the latter part is no longer offered as a result of funding cuts.

4.11 Swinburne University of Technology Graduate Certificate of Social Science (Housing Management and Policy)
Swinburne University’s Graduate Certificate and Graduate Diploma in Housing Management and Policy are designed for those who already hold graduate qualifications, or who have worked in the housing and homelessness sector for at least five years. Many of the students of this blended learning, distance education course currently work in the homelessness sector. Study is part-time and most students are sponsored to study by their employers, which pay travel costs, tuition fees and study time. The strengths and opportunities of part-time study whilst working are considered later in this report. The course does contain modules on homelessness, but currently does not offer a great enough range of specific
homelessness content to fill the current gap in homelessness sector education (discussed in the following chapter).

4.12 Conclusion
This chapter has looked at what training and development is currently available to the relatively small numbers of employees working in the specialist homelessness sector. Chapter five discusses currently unmet needs and likely future needs, bearing in mind the dynamic nature of the industry sector.

5 Current and projected unmet education and training needs of the homelessness workforce

5.1 Introduction
The homelessness and housing contextual matters discussed in chapter two revealed that homelessness workforce’s professional development needs could be impacted by the changing structural causes of homelessness in Australia. In this chapter we discuss what needs are currently unmet, and how these needs are likely to alter in the future.

5.2 Qualification levels in the homelessness sector
In their report, Martin et al (2012) established some significant facts about the current homelessness workforce which are pertinent to matters of workforce development:

- Homelessness professionals are employed in such roles as housing/tenancy support workers, outreach workers, social workers, counsellors and nurses. Nearly half of these professional employees hold a bachelor’s degree or postgraduate qualification, and almost all of the other half have a diploma or a certificate. These qualifications tend to be in fields relevant to the homelessness services sector, such as community work, social work and psychology or counselling (Martin et al, 2012), but not in housing or homelessness specifically.

- Residential support workers, children’s workers and community-education type workers’ constitute one-third of the homelessness services workforce. The majority of them have a diploma or a certificate, with 20 per cent holding a bachelor’s degree or postgraduate qualification. Only 15 per cent have no post-school qualification. The most common area in which these non-professionals obtained their qualifications was community work.

- About 90 per cent of the homelessness sector workforce has some form of post-school qualifications. These are mostly in community work, social work, psychology, counselling or youth work. The homelessness services workforce is therefore quite highly educated in comparison to the Australian workforce as a whole, where 50 per cent have no post-school qualifications.
Martin et al (2012) found that managers from larger, secular and urban-based services tend to report that their organisations required higher qualifications. Those from residential services and religious-based organisations and those from outer metropolitan and rural areas were more likely to report that their organisations accepted certificate-level qualifications and/or some industry experience as prerequisites for employment (Martin et al, 2012).

5.3 Factors influencing the current unmet education and training needs of the Australian homelessness workforce

There were mixed responses from employer interviewees in our research about the minimum level of qualifications that their organisations sought when recruiting new staff. Responses varied according to the type of service, location and type of organisation. It is becoming increasingly apparent that the root cause of homelessness for many people in Australia, whatever the client’s presenting cause (such as domestic or family violence, youth or age), is the lack of affordable housing available to them. In many cases, people facing losing their homes would be able to manage their own situation if there was an adequate supply of affordable accommodation available. It is becoming increasingly necessary, therefore, that those working in the homelessness sector have a mix of welfare and housing knowledge in order to do the best for their clients, particularly around assisting them to access housing in the private rental sector. It is perhaps this mix of skills and knowledge (which varies depending on which client group the worker specialises in) that the White Paper was referring to as currently missing within the homelessness workforce.

Although the workforce can be considered well qualified, our research did reveal that there are some serious shortcomings in current education and training procurement. Perhaps the most important finding of these is that, without sufficient government subsidy, TAFEs are unlikely to be able to offer courses designed specifically to meet the requirements of the homelessness and housing sectors; sectors which are increasingly merging as homelessness becomes recognised as multi-faceted and part of a structural housing issue, rather than solely as a welfare matter. This is an important matter, because in our research participants repeatedly stated that current education and training provision is not specific enough to effectively advance the professional development of the homelessness workforce. Both education providers and specialist homelessness services considered it likely that homelessness agencies’ needs will continue to be swamped by the demands put forward by the much larger parts of the community services sector for generalist community services curricula. Interviewees also highlighted that weak links between homelessness service providers, peak organisations, education and training providers and government providers are currently hindering the development of relevant curricula and suitable courses.
Specialist homelessness service representatives generally considered their education and training budgets inadequate; they are highly reliant on government-subsidised training through state-based training calendars run by peak organisations and TAFEs. Rural and remote service representatives considered themselves disadvantaged by their distance from metropolitan centres of learning, and said that information technology infrastructure can be a barrier to distance learning in some areas. The inability to be able to afford to ‘backfill’ staff in order to release staff for training was viewed as biggest barrier to training, especially for crisis homelessness services. All these factors can negatively impact on unmet workforce development needs.

5.4 Specialist homelessness services’ approaches to workforce development through education and training

Our research revealed that the attitudes towards, and the consequent approaches to, workforce development varied widely between organisations, in term of such things as budget allocation, amount of internal training undertaken and direct linkages made to staff performance assessment practices.

Some of the researched agencies, particularly the larger ones, provide considerable internal training for staff in order to ensure that standards are maintained. Some agencies have team-based training and education budgets, or budget a certain amount for each staff member. The larger agencies were more able to provide structured human resources and workforce development support.

Competency-based work performance assessment, specifically linked to education and training opportunities, is undertaken in some larger agencies. Most of the researched agencies considered that they were generous in terms of fee-relief for courses and the amount of study leave given to staff, although this was not always the view of staff.

5.5 Staff attitudes to education and training

Many employees who took part in the interviews and the survey were positively interested in formalising their skills and gaining recognition through undertaking accredited education. The majority wanted this in order to ensure that their learning was up to date and that they were aware of best practice. Some managers stated that some longstanding workers in the homelessness sector are resistant to training and education. This was thought to perhaps be because of ‘reform fatigue’ on the part of workers who have seen several reiterations of good practice during their employment, or due to the pressure to be more accountable and transparent in work practice. Workers who took part in our research seemed aware that there is an inconsistency in the current skill and competency levels within the workforce. Some put this down to the numbers of British workers now in the Australian homelessness sector, whom they felt do not always have enough local knowledge and enough knowledge of Indigenous Australian cultural issues; others attributed the inconsistency to a more
general lack of knowledge of structural, human rights and client focus homelessness issues and practices within the homelessness workforce.

5.6 Case work and case management workforce development in the specialist Homelessness Services Sector

Issues concerning case work and case management, particularly integrated case management for clients, were frequently raised as gaps in current workforce development and knowledge, and concerns were raised that integrated case work is not universally well understood, and that best practices are not always maintained. Participants considered that the complexity of case work means that workers need to be able to exercise a high level of judgement and have expert knowledge of their specialist area. Although case work theory is taught in the TAFE Certificate Four and Diploma in Community Services, respondents considered that there was difficulty in obtaining sufficient experience and practice of casework skills during student placements to enable workers to be able to effectively carry out this type of work. The development of senior practitioner ’ roles, as promoted in the homelessness White Paper, was generally recognised as an effective way in which case management skills could be mentored and developed internally within organisations. This has the added advantage that a career development opportunity is created (along with enhanced remuneration) for those with these skills, experience and the ability to teach others the relational aspects of effective case work. Respondents particularly identified a need for higher-skill levels amongst the workforce in working collaboratively with other homelessness services and mainstream service providers, so as to collaborate effectively in multidisciplinary work. This was particularly raised in relation to clients affected by drug and alcohol and mental health issues, but is also relevant to other client groups, such as those whose homelessness is attributed to their youth or their experience of domestic and family violence.

As well as the need for more detailed education and training on case management issues, respondents spoke of the increasing need for more education and training opportunities in the future for those who are not new to the sector but who take on a supervisory role. Some of the workforce development available in the supervision area is customised training delivered by consultants, and consequently was considered by some interviewees as too expensive for their agencies to afford.

5.7 The poor fit between university-level courses and vocational education and training

One of the issues in education and training for the homelessness sector raised by the research affects the human service area generally; that is, the often poor ‘fit’ between TAFE vocational education and training (VET) courses and university courses. ‘Poor fit’ can include a lack of recognition of VET-level courses in university courses, and also the lack of clear articulation from VET to university. For example, many workers may have a Certificate Four
or Certificate Five in Community Services but cannot get any credit recognition in graduate certificate or diploma courses in the same areas. This is because (a) there is a perceived gap in educational attainment between these courses and a Level Eight postgraduate qualification and (b) there are inconsistencies between teaching methods; that is, between competency-based (TAFE) and critical analysis learning (universities).

The common entry-level qualification is a Level Four certificate, which takes between six months and two years to complete. The Australian Qualification Foundation (AQF) states that those who successfully complete courses at this level have acquired ‘the theoretical and practical knowledge and skills for specialised skilled work’. Those with a Level Five diploma have ‘specialised knowledge and skills for skilled professional work’. There is frequently then a gap in the education acquired by members of the homelessness workforce at Level Six (associate degree and advanced diploma), and at Level Seven (bachelor’s degree), before the Level Eight Graduate Certificate in Social Science (Housing Management and Policy) from Swinburne University or other postgraduate qualifications. Level Eight graduates are defined by the AQF as ‘having advanced knowledge and skills for highly skilled professional work’. The Swinburne Level Eight graduates have acquired a thorough knowledge of housing and homelessness organisations and their context within the wider political and economic environment. The most obvious articulation or need for recognition is from Certificate Four programs in community service/social housing to the Graduate Certificate and Diploma in Housing Management and Policy. However, this not only represents a leap of four levels but faces, as is the case in much TAFE-to-university articulation, the problems of funding silos and financial sustainability. Every one-subject credit into a university course given to a student from TAFE (for example, credit for one subject in a four-subject graduate certificate) represents a loss of one subject’s worth of fees. This is often the major factor in institutional resistance to articulation.

5.8 Barriers to effective education and training

As discussed earlier, there are relatively low numbers of homelessness workers in each state and territory, and they are spread across a range of different types of work, which makes cost-effective, specific, face-to-face education and training difficult to provide and obtain. Many homelessness workers work for small organisations, and although some are based in large human or community service government departments, the majority work for not-for-profit organisations of varying sizes (Martin et al, 2012). This means there may only be relatively few staff in each organisation, which can make covering absences when staff members attend education or training very difficult. This implies that larger agencies are more able to offer more opportunities (and resources) for external education and training than smaller agencies.

In response to questions about current workforce challenges faced by the Australian homelessness services sector, Martin et al (2012) found that staff retention difficulties; the
need for new and upgraded skills to meet the changing and increasingly complex needs of clients; changing policy directions and service-delivery models; higher expectations from clients and funders of service quality standards; and increasing complexity in accountability requirements were most often raised. Their participants also articulated a need for more advanced administrative and information technology skills, as information management systems become more sophisticated (Martin et al, 2012). All of these workforce development challenges will only be overcome if there is adequate provision of education and training designed to meet these needs.

Another barrier for the sector, as alluded to earlier, is the tyranny of distance. Many workers are in locations where it is difficult to access professional development, education and training, and few courses are available in flexible delivery (distance education) formats that are appropriate for such workers.

On top of these issues is the disjuncture between a lot of homelessness research and its use for teaching purposes. Much homelessness research in Australia (and it is of a high quality) is written up for a different audience than the homelessness and social housing sector workers themselves. It tends to be reported for policy or academic purposes, neither of which provides a user friendly format for transmission to workers. In many areas of learning, the teachers and the researchers are often one and the same, but in the homelessness area – where in-house professional development and TAFE programs are the most important levels of delivery – those delivering the information are quite different people from those doing the research. In many cases deliverers may have no knowledge of the latest homelessness research.

6 How can unmet training and education needs best be met?
Recommendations for the future

1 Introduction
This chapter considers how appropriate education and training of the Australian homelessness workforce could best be provided in the future.

6.2 Does Australia need specialist homelessness educational qualifications?
There was widespread support from our research participants for more specialist homelessness qualifications, but there were varied views about the feasibility of specialist homelessness qualifications for Australia. This was mainly because the sector is not seen as large enough to support specialist qualifications, and also because of concerns that workers’ career options could be reduced as a result of having a homelessness rather than community services qualification.
Homelessness work embodies a myriad of specialist areas of knowledge, including case work and management, early intervention and prevention. Other gaps that our research revealed as not yet adequately covered by existing education and training provision for the homelessness sector include trauma, private rental brokerage, children’s homelessness issues, data collection in some states, cultural competency, client with complex needs, hoarding and squalor and transgender issues. Education and training in these areas are not fully available within existing education curricula. Furthermore, these issues have different aspects depending on the focus client group, requiring a variety of educational and training options to be available.

The changing structure of the homelessness sector was recognised by our research participants as creating current gaps in effective workforce development. Especially discussed was the policy trend away from a focus on crisis provision and towards prevention and early intervention (led by the White Paper on homelessness), which was highlighted as an example of the changing development needs of the workforce yet to be adequately met through education and training provision. There was recognition that changing service models require new skills, and that there is a lack of knowledge on housing market conditions and how to deal with them, and therefore a lack of available exits from homelessness. Homelessness is now viewed as a housing problem as well as a welfare issue.

Organisations made some links between their difficulties in recruiting and retaining suitable staff, and workforce development issues. The former social and community services (SACS) award did not reward workers who gained skills and experience, and therefore did not encourage workers to remain in the sector. Some agencies have addressed this by introducing a senior practitioner level for case work which is assessable and pays more. Comments were made that homelessness work is not well recognised as a career option by university students, and that this needs to be improved. If TAFE community service courses cannot remain viable, this will seriously undermine the sector’s ability to recruit appropriately qualified staff. It was generally agreed that there is a lack of coordination around education and training of homelessness staff around the country, and that the specialist homelessness services sector has not effectively voiced its education and training needs up to now.

Research participants also commented on how research dissemination can assist with the development of the homelessness workforce. Australian Housing and Urban Research Institute (AHURI) reports were cited as the main ways in which homelessness research findings were made available to workers, although lack of time, or encouragement, to read these was felt to be a negative factor. Some agencies reported compiling digests of research findings for staff, or distributing information via email bulletins. There were varied opinions about the worth of conferences for the dissemination of information. Furthermore, some participants reported an overload of information being available to them, which in itself
created a barrier to finding what was useful and usable. Education and training were not considered adequate means of disseminating research about good practice as yet, and this needs to be improved.

A specialist homelessness and housing qualification with an adequate number of optional study specialisms is undoubtedly needed, at a range of educational levels. Given the low employee numbers, time constraints and geographical spread of workers, such a course should be available in a flexible delivery format. How such a program could be financed is a difficult question. At the moment we are in a situation where the need for a national workforce development strategy is discussed, but not yet actioned. It would seem most sensible that this should occur as part of the NPAH, and that education and training for the sector should also be funded through the NPAH. This could be designated funding to services pro rata based on the number of staff they employ, and come with conditions of implementing workforce development standards in order to ensure consistency. Research on matters of good practice could be effectively disseminated through this route.

6.3 Future workforce development needs
The current mainstay of homelessness service delivery is a crisis approach, which is not focused on ending homelessness in Australia, but rather on dealing with it once it has occurred. As discussed earlier, however, the 2008 homelessness White Paper has opened up a new policy discourse on homelessness prevention, and has begun to lead a change of focus, particularly around women and children who have experienced domestic and family violence (Spinney, 2012). There is still a long way to go before homelessness prevention becomes a mainstay approach in Australia, as it has become in the UK during the last decade, and pertinent training and education of the homelessness workforce is a vital part of developing the new focus. It is likely that homelessness policy will continue in this direction regardless of which political party holds power, at either state or Commonwealth level.

This is because, apart from being good practice for clients, it is a sensible approach in the current and projected situation of major housing shortage in Australia. The skills which are increasingly needed as a result include: outreach working; providing peer support in a non-residential setting; building clients’ financial capability and confidence; raising integrated case working and negotiation skills with courts, police and substance abuse agencies; risk assessment and security planning; child protection; and dealing with challenging behaviours. There is potential danger to clients if they receive these types of services from staff who are inadequately trained. Staff engaged in placing homeless people in motels, boarding houses and caravan parks need to be able to exercise good judgement if they are to keep their clients safe. Our research revealed that managers feel some staff currently come into the homeless sector unprepared for real-life situations and housing solutions.
In Australia there is an increasing need for remote and rural homelessness staff to be able to access training. In the UK, training is made available at a national level through distance e-learning provided by the Chartered Institute of Housing through De Montfort University. As mentioned previously, Australia also has to find ways of addressing the tyranny of distance, and distance e-learning would seem the most feasible approach in terms of effectiveness, convenience and cost of delivery.

Our research revealed that there is also a need for relevant stakeholders to come together to plan and address the training and education needs of the homelessness sector. For the postgraduate suite of housing courses delivered by Swinburne University, this is partly managed by an annual two-day stakeholders’ meeting of education providers, public and community housing agency representatives, the course reference group and academics, who discuss the pertinent training needs of the housing sector. Increasingly, homelessness services agencies represent as a sizable part of the student cohort of these courses, and in future it is intended that specialist homelessness services will be represented at these meetings. Similar opportunities to influence curricula also need to be available for lower-level courses. There is, in addition, a need for an undergraduate qualification with a substantial homelessness and housing element that will fill the gap between the TAFE-level qualifications and postgraduate qualifications available.

Staff and managers of services expressed a desire for their on-the-job training to be accredited and recognised. This was seen as an important element of staff development, but one that is not yet recognised enough to enable staff to transfer their employment easily between organisations with demonstrable knowledge. Enabling staff portability is an important strategy to enabling workers to stay in the sector. This is an important issue if key acquired skills are to be developed and maintained within the sector. The bearing of training and education costs by homelessness services, rather than reclaiming them from staff members leaving for a new employer, is also an important way of enabling staff portability.

6.4 Studying whilst working
Homelessness sector workers tend to study part-time whilst working full-time and consequently face conflicting demands to study and meet the other obligations in their lives. One of the reasons that mature students study part-time is that they have other commitments such as family, work and financial obligations that prevent them from studying full-time. Their study therefore has to fit in with their other commitments if they are to complete their courses successfully (Kember, 1999). In a 2002 study by Davey on older students, respondents were asked to rank five motives for returning to study after the age of 40. Wishing to acquire new knowledge or qualifications to improve job performance and prospect was the top motive for 52 per cent of participants (Davey, 2002). This is in accord with our findings on why members of the homeless workforce are motivated to participate in education and training.
There are several issues of importance for students which have implications for how education and training can be encouraged for those working in the homelessness sector. These are: financial support for study, the amount of work and personal time spent on study and the difficulty in finding this time, compromises that have to be made in parenting and hobbies, the difficulties of studying a vocational course after a day of work, and students’ hopes for the long-term gains to be achieved by completing courses. These issues will have to be effectively addressed if we are to deal with some of the serious shortcomings in current education and training for the homelessness sector workforce, both in terms of the study options available and the ways staff can access education and training. Our recommendation is that staff members are incentivised to take part in education and training by having their studies provided free of charge for them, and by having adequate study time and staff cover allocated to enable them to study in an equitable manner.

7 Conclusion
This research has looked at how we can improve the education and training provided to the Australian homelessness sector workforce. We know that the staff who make up the specialist homelessness workforce are more qualified now than they have ever been (Martin et al, 2012). However, as the White Paper on homelessness highlighted, staff development of this workforce is a problem. Staff hold qualifications, but they are not the right ones to fully enable them to effectively carry out their current and projected roles.

Furthermore, the right qualifications do not exist at the moment; there is a need for new homelessness and housing qualifications to be developed at different educational levels and with adequate options for specialist client group study options. Relevant stakeholders must be enabled to influence the curricula of these courses, and the courses must be adaptable and dynamic to meet changing needs.

Designated funding is needed within the NPAH for organisations to educate and train their staff (including the provision of staff cover to enable study time), and incentives are needed for both organisations and staff members themselves to actively participate in training and education. Study methods must be flexible enough to allow staff in all areas of the country to participate.
Appendices – data collection instruments

APPENDIX ONE  Information Statement

Information Statement

WORKFORCE TRAINING FOR THE HOMELESSNESS SECTOR

Principal Investigators

Dr Angela Spinney, Swinburne Institute for Social Research Swinburne University of Technology, Melbourne, Australia
Dr Andrea Sharam, Swinburne Institute for Social Research Swinburne University of Technology, Melbourne, Australia

Invitation to Participate

The research project aims to investigate and assess the training currently provided for the Australian homelessness workforce and to identify what the sector sees as the core skills and knowledge required for the various roles within the sector.

You are invited to participate in this project as someone who has expertise and knowledge of the homelessness sector. We would like to conduct an interview with you at your workplace or other convenient place, in person or by telephone, about issues surrounding workforce training.

The project

The project is designed to assess the professional development needs of the homelessness sector and to determine what is already offered, and what the gaps are in current provision.

The project is funded by the Commonwealth Government (via FaSCHIA) to Swinburne University of Technology as part of the National Homelessness Research Fund.

What is involved?

If you participate in the project, an experienced researcher will interview you face to face or on the telephone in your workplace or at another mutually agreed location. We anticipate that an interview will take up to one hour. The questions will follow a template which we can send to you prior to the interview if you would like this. We will ask you to answer as an individual who has knowledge in this area rather than as a representative of the organisation that you work for. The researcher will take notes of the interview and, with your consent, make an electronic recording as back up for later checking of accuracy and comprehensiveness of the notes. The electronic recordings will not be transcribed.
Your rights and interests

Participation in the project is entirely voluntary: you can choose not to be interviewed, not to answer a question, or to withdraw from the interview at any time you wish. You will be asked to sign a consent form prior to the interview.

In signing the attached consent form, you are indicating that you have permission from your organisation to discuss these issues from your personal perspective without prejudice to any official position on this matter which may be held by your organisation.

Privacy & Confidentiality

The electronic recordings (where applicable), interview notes and signed consent forms will be kept securely at the premises of the researchers and not made available to any other party. The project report, or any other academic publications, will not attribute opinions that you have expressed to you personally, either by name or position, and you will not be able to be identified in this respect. We would, however, like to acknowledge your contribution as one of a list of contributors but you may choose not to be acknowledged in this way if you wish.

Research publications

The research may result in a Report which will be published electronically and in paper format. This is at the discretion of FaCHSIA.

There may also be other publications arising from the research in the form of peer-reviewed articles in academic journals and presentations at conferences.

Further information about the project

For further information about the project, please contact the researcher who is coordinating the fieldwork.

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Concerns or complaints

This project has been approved by or on behalf of Swinburne’s Human Research Ethics Committee (SUHREC) in line with the National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research. If you have any concerns or complaints about the conduct of this project, you can contact:

Research Ethics Officer, Swinburne Research (H68),
Swinburne University of Technology, PO Box 218, HAWTHORN VIC 3122, Australia.
Tel (03) 9214 5218 or +61 3 9214 5218 or resethics@swin.edu.au
APPENDIX TWO – Consent Form

Swinburne University of Technology

Project Title: WORKFORCE TRAINING FOR THE HOMELESSNESS SECTOR

Principal Investigators:
Dr Angela Spinney, Swinburne Institute for Social Research Swinburne University of Technology, Melbourne, Australia
Dr Andrea Sharam, Swinburne Institute for Social Research Swinburne University of Technology, Melbourne, Australia

1. I consent to participate in the project named above. I have been provided a copy of the project consent information statement to which this consent form relates and any questions I have asked have been answered to my satisfaction.

2. I acknowledge that:

(a) my participation is voluntary and that I am free to refuse to answer any question or withdraw from the project at any time without explanation;
(b) the project is for the purpose of research and not for profit;
(c) any identifiable information about me which is gathered in the course of and as the result of my participating in this project will be (i) collected and retained for the purpose of this project and (ii) accessed and analysed by the researcher(s) for the purpose of conducting this project;
(d) I have been authorised to speak by my organisation;
(e) The views expressed are my own rather than represent the views of the organisation that employs me;
(f) The project report, or any other publications, will not attribute opinions that have expressed by me, either by name or position, and I will not be able to be identified in this respect.

We would, however, like to acknowledge your contribution as one of a list of contributors but you may choose not to be acknowledged in this way if you wish (please circle)

Yes  No

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I agree to allow the interview to be recorded by electronic device (please circle)

Yes  No

By signing this document I agree to participate in this project.

Name of Participant: .................................................................

Signature & Date: .................................................................
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