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This is a communique from the Co-Chairs of the Ministerial Homelessness Reform and Advisory Group.

Welcoming new members

The Ministerial Homelessness Reform Advisory Group (the Advisory Group) welcomed 2 new members at the December meeting.

Stephen Nash, CEO, Kids Under Cover and Michelle Thompson, CEO, Family Access Network attended their first meeting of the Advisory Group. The Advisory Group welcomed their vital expertise in supporting young people, families and LGBTIQ+ Victorians who are experiencing or at risk of homelessness.

Towards a culturally safe homelessness system

In 2022, Victoria's Aboriginal community developed a vision for a future Aboriginal-specific homelessness system - the *Blueprint for an Aboriginal-specific homelessness system in Victoria* (the Blueprint). The Blueprint guides how the Aboriginal community is designing modern, evidence-based programs to meet the needs of their communities.

Darren Smith, CEO, of Aboriginal Housing Victoria – the system steward for the Aboriginal housing and homelessness systems – provided an update on progress towards a self-determined Aboriginal homelessness service system.

Darren shared feedback from the Aboriginal community, including members of the Aboriginal Housing and Homelessness Forum. The feedback focused on areas for improvement in mainstream services to deliver a system that is culturally safe and responsive to the needs of Aboriginal Victorians. These areas include:

- building strong, effective and trusting relationships between mainstream and Aboriginal providers
- guarding against mainstream services inappropriately redirecting Aboriginal people to Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations, which minimises Aboriginal peoples' choice of where to receive homelessness services
- transparency of resource allocation and the outcomes for Aboriginal peoples
- accountability of mainstream systems and providers to be culturally safe.

Darren also provided an update on the work Victoria's Aboriginal community is leading to develop a new Closing the Gap measure on Aboriginal homelessness – proposed for inclusion in the National Closing the Gap framework.

The Advisory Group discussed the importance of having an intentional focus across the mainstream homelessness system to address the overrepresentation of Aboriginal peoples experiencing homelessness and improve cultural safety.

There is much to learn from the work to implement the Blueprint as the Advisory Group continues its consideration of reform of the Victorian homelessness-system.

Reform of the homelessness system

The Advisory Group considered reform directions across 4 key domains. These domains have been developed through advice over the last 12 months from the Advisory Group, its Action Groups, the Homelessness Lived Experience Expert Advisory Panel and the Blueprint Steering Committee. The 4 domains cover:

1. An Aboriginal self-determined homelessness system, including how the mainstream homelessness system is culturally safe to respond to Aboriginal peoples' needs
2. Modern and effective service models, including future options for supported accommodation currently focused on the Transitional Housing Management model transitioning to a greater capacity to respond to the growing number of people experiencing rough sleeping and chronic homelessness

3. System leadership, service coordination and delivery to best support a system that is responsive to local priorities and needs
4. Prioritising different needs, including modernising the Opening Doors Framework for a system that supports people to access services that are proportionate and tailored to their needs.

The discussions will continue into 2025.

Report into Specialist Homelessness Workforce

In noting the findings of this report, the Advisory Group acknowledged the pressure under which frontline staff are working and expressed collective recognition to all members of the homelessness workforce in managing the demand and complexity that they are dealing with every day.

Next steps

The Advisory Group will hold an all-day workshop in early 2025 to continue its discussions on proposed reform directions.

The Advisory Group expresses its appreciation for the input provided by the Initial Assessment and Planning and Accommodation and Support Action Groups and would like to thank the participants for their involvement. The role of the Action Groups is now complete.

The Advisory Group has directed further engagement with the homelessness sector to assist the Advisory Group in developing its advice to the Minister to occur in 2025. This engagement will be led by Deborah Di Natale, CEO, Council to Homeless Persons and co-chair of the Advisory Group with Homes Victoria providing secretariat support.

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