

## **Housing and Homelessness Ministers' Meeting**

**31 March 2016**

### **Communiqué**

Housing and Homelessness Ministers met in Brisbane on 31 March 2016.

Commonwealth, State and Territory Ministers last met together in March 2013, although State and Territory Ministers met in October 2015. This first meeting of 2016 in Brisbane was an opportunity for Ministers to consider key issues and agree to further work and national collaboration around housing and homelessness.

#### **Homelessness Policy and Funding**

Ministers discussed the importance of a sustainable and longer term policy and funding approach to integrated housing and homelessness services, recognising the need for all Australians to have access to safe, appropriate and affordable housing and the need for a reliable and flexible service support system to meet the current and future needs of vulnerable people.

Ministers noted the importance of ensuring funding certainty for continuity of homelessness services and the need for homelessness services to be advised as to the future of funding arrangements at least 6 months prior to expiry of the 2015-17 National Partnership Agreement on Homelessness (NPAH).

Ministers further discussed the important national issue of domestic and family violence and the need for a multi-faceted approach to prevent and address homelessness caused by domestic and family violence. Ministers noted that any funding should not be at the expense of existing services.

Ministers agreed to commission a report on future policy reforms and funding options for homelessness beyond July 2017 including consideration of a five year funding approach with indexation. The report will be presented by 30 September 2016, and Commonwealth, State and Territory Ministers will meet soon after to consider the report. This will form the basis of recommendations to COAG by the end of 2016 on funding options beyond July 2017.

Ministers also discussed the need for a better understanding of the scope of homelessness issues for returned veterans and the possible responses to address this by the Commonwealth, with the support of States and Territories.

#### **Automatic Rent Deduction Scheme**

Ministers noted a proposal to seek agreement from the Commonwealth for the introduction of a national automatic rent deduction scheme for social housing households. The scheme will be flexible enough to allow States and Territories to determine if and how they participate in the scheme and align possible implementation with their own legislative and policy settings.

## **COAG reforms and Affordable Housing**

Ministers noted a briefing from the Commonwealth on the progress of the major reform tasks underway, and discussed the work of the Council on Federal Financial Relations' Affordable Housing Working Group. The Group is now considering proposals for innovative financing and structural reform models to increase the provision of affordable private and social housing, and will engage with state and territory housing portfolios around viable options under consideration prior to the final report being handed down.

Ministers discussed a range of matters including the need to ensure an appropriate interface between homelessness and housing reform work, the need for a differentiated approach to addressing homelessness and housing in cities and in regional and remote areas, and the potential for innovative financing models to increase supply and diversity in social housing models to meet the needs of vulnerable groups including elderly people.

## **Disability and Housing**

Ministers discussed the impacts of a significant anticipated increased demand on accessible, affordable and social housing from the full implementation of the National Disability Insurance Scheme and agreed to work collaboratively with the National Disability Insurance Agency to develop accurate information and projections of the likely demand for social housing and affordable housing at full scheme and beyond.

Commonwealth and State and Territory Governments will consider future funding approaches and opportunities to increase the supply of accessible, affordable and social housing appropriate for people living with disability, including through the Affordable Housing Working Group.

## **Way Forward**

Ministers concluded their meeting with a focus on the strategic and innovative initiatives their respective jurisdictions are adopting to respond to funding challenges and sustainability, and agreed on actions for further collaborative work to address reforms for housing and homelessness.

Ministers agreed they would meet again by November 2016 and report further progress on housing and homelessness services and housing affordability later in 2016 through the Council of Australian Governments (COAG) process.