

Supplementary information:

**Melbourne City Mission evidence to the
Legal and Social Issues Committee *Inquiry into End of Life Choices***

At the Inquiry hearing on 14th October 2015, the Legal and Social Issues Committee inquired about likely future demand for palliative care amongst people who have multiple and complex needs (in addition to their diagnosis of a life-limiting condition), for example, people who have drug or alcohol issues, and people who are experiencing homelessness.

In response, Melbourne City Mission provided anecdotal information about increasing rates of homelessness, particularly rough sleeping. Melbourne City Mission also advised that additional information could be provided, in particular from Melbourne City Mission strategic planning documents. The following information is provided as follow-up.

Extract from Melbourne City Mission strategic planning documentation:

The changing environment at a glance:

- *Growing inequity*
- *Multiple and complex disadvantage*
- *Unsustainable demand*
- *Seemingly intractable social problems*

There are almost one million Victorians who have one or more determinants of disadvantage and more than 300,000 Victorians are on the Commonwealth Disability Support Pension and Newstart allowance.¹

The State Government has noted that: *“With Victoria’s population projected to increase from 5.546 million in 2010 to 7.327 million by 2031, demand for services will increase. The population aged over 65 will represent 19.5 per cent of Victoria’s population by 2031, compared to 13.8 per cent in 2010. The ageing population is also likely to generate higher demand than today. With significant latent demand already existing, governments have limited ability to cope with this surge in both the volume and intensity of services over the medium to long term. The current situation is unsustainable.”*²

Data shows that the need for support tends to be concentrated in particular postcodes, population groups, and families, and that it is often entrenched. For example, the Department cites data from the Household, Income and Labour Dynamics in Australia Survey from the period 2001-08, which showed 35 per cent of the Australian population experienced poverty at one time or another. Most of these people experienced poverty for periods of less than two years; however 2.1 per cent of the population experienced poverty throughout the entire period. A further 8 per cent were in poverty for five of these years. Assuming a similar distribution to the national figures, this would mean over 100,000 Victorians were in poverty throughout the period, and more than 400,000 more were in poverty for five of the eight years³.

¹ Department of Human Services (2013), *Human Services: The Case for Change*

² Ibid.

³ Ibid.

The nature of disadvantage is increasingly complex, with “*strong evidence of multiple disadvantage among client groups with the highest levels of need in the human services system*”⁴.

For example, the Department cites:

- A 2010 survey of young offenders in custody revealed that 35 per cent had previous child protection involvement, 34 per cent presented with mental health issues, and 88 per cent of cases had alcohol or drug use related to their offending
- Young people leaving care have a higher predisposition to mental illness, including anxiety or post-traumatic stress disorder as a result of violence, and other forms of chronic mental illness such as depression, bi-polar disorder and schizophrenia, and other significant issues including drug and alcohol addiction, physical and intellectual disabilities, homelessness and involvement with the policy and justice systems
- One study of 4,291 people using homelessness services in inner-Melbourne found that 15 per cent of the group had mental health issues before becoming homeless, while a further 16 per cent had developed mental health problems after becoming homeless
- Research into disadvantage consistently indicates that families experiencing the most problems tend to be the least financially secure and often have multiple disadvantages. A relatively common constellation of disadvantages are low income and assets; low skills; difficulties finding and keeping a job; housing stress and poor health.⁵

A major concern for governments and services is intergenerational disadvantage. Victoria has a relatively high rate of households with children in which no adult is employed; sitting at 11.9 per cent compared to an OECD average of 6.4 per cent. In 2010-11, it was estimated that over 150,000 Victorian children aged less than 15 years lived in a family with no employed parent, and 65 per cent of these children lived in one-parent families⁶. Unemployment is the most important single cause of child poverty in Australia. The documented adverse impacts of growing up in a jobless household range from family violence, truancy and non-completion of schooling, to substance abuse, poor health and premature death.

Going into a new Strategic Plan, Melbourne City Mission’s work will take place against a backdrop of rising income inequality (as per the findings of the December 2014 report of the Senate Community References Affairs Committee, following their inquiry into the extent of income inequality in Australia), an ongoing shortage of affordable housing, and growing youth disengagement (exacerbated by cuts to education re-engagement, youth training and mentoring programs, loss of job opportunities in the changing economy, and punitive welfare reform measures) – and thus, increased demand for support – but in an environment of policy and funding reform designed to reduce burden on government.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Ibid.

A key message communicated by both Federal and State governments is that demand for government-funded supports (payments and services) is unsustainable⁷. This message has been communicated through the Federal Budget process and through policy and funding reform projects at both a Federal and State level (for example, the McClure Review into welfare, the Victorian Service Sector Reform initiative, Services Connect pilots). Particular areas of focus are performance-based contracts and funding and case management approaches that are designed to reduce long-term system demand (e.g. Services Connect), as well as a tightening of eligibility for support.

In terms of demand, the 2013 Australian Community Sector Survey highlighted key challenges for the sector. More than 50 per cent of organisations providing housing and homelessness (66%), legal (63%) and youth and youth welfare services (52%) reported being unable to meet demand for their services. A high proportion of emergency relief providers (47%), mental health (47%) and domestic violence and sexual assault services (46%) also reported being unable to meet demand for services.⁸

This is borne out in Melbourne City Mission's services such as youth crisis accommodation (a runaway rate of 66 per cent for youth refuges).

Additional data – housing and homelessness

- Homelessness increased by 31 per cent from 2006 to 2011 Census. It continues on an upward trajectory, particularly in relation to women and dependent children and adolescent and young adult males and females who are fleeing family violence.
- In 1995 the Australian median dwelling price was 2.4 times the medium income. In Melbourne in 2015 it is 6.6 times the medium wage.

⁷ See Department of Social Services (2014) *A New System for Better Employment and Social Outcomes – Interim Report of the Reference Group on Welfare Reform to the Minister for Social Services* (known colloquially as the McClure Review) and Shergold, P (2013), *Service Sector Reform: a roadmap for community and human services reform*

⁸ Published at www.acoss.org.au