



Recommendations Paper: A Homelessness Peak Body, South Australia

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About Toward Home Alliance

The Toward Home Alliance is a consortium of partners, working together to prevent and end homelessness. It consists of Aboriginal Family Support Services, Baptist Care SA, Hutt St Centre, Lutheran Care, Mission Australia, Sonder, The St Vincent de Paul Society SA, and The Salvation Army, alongside government partner the Department of Human Services.

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Executive Summary

Currently, South Australia does not have a funded peak body representing the specialist homelessness services (SHS) sector. Without this, the South Australian homelessness sector risks being overlooked or misrepresented in advocacy and policymaking, on both a state and federal level. The need for a collective sector voice has become increasingly evident in the challenges faced by South Australia's SHS sector over the last four years, through absorbing reductions in net funding whilst responding to unprecedented demand challenges.

This paper provides an overview of peak advocacy bodies representing homelessness on both a state and federal level in Australia, and the associated funding, resourcing, structure and outputs of key peaks. Peak bodies operating in adjacent areas, such as housing, community services and family and domestic violence were also examined. As part of this research, conversations with various stakeholders and sector representatives were conducted, and key themes and reflections of these conversations are summarised. The features, benefits and crucial components of an effective peak body are outlined, with recommendations made for the future direction of South Australia's homelessness sector advocacy.

This paper concludes that South Australia is the only state/territory in Australia without a funded homelessness peak body, with all other state/territory homelessness peaks receiving a majority of their funding from the associated state/territory government. Homelessness peak bodies are observed to deliver a vast array of services for the sector they represent, including advocacy, workforce development, consultation and research/policy development. This paper's research indicates that with adequate resourcing and support, homelessness peak bodies are key actors in progressing change on an individual, service and system level. It is recommended that further advocacy and sector consultation is progressed, with the view of securing dedicated funding for a South Australian homelessness sector peak body.

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Introduction

Specialist homelessness services (SHS) support people at risk of or currently experiencing homelessness; providing early intervention responses, access to emergency accommodation and transitional housing, connections to support services, outreach support, care coordination, material aid, and advocacy to secure and maintain long-term housing (Department of Social Services, 2023). Specialist homelessness services are jointly funded by the Australian Government and state and territory governments, with state and territory governments responsible for day-to-day delivery of services (SCRGSP, 2025).

The homelessness workforce is seen as a “critical component of the objective to end homelessness in Australia”, particularly in implementing systemic approaches towards preventing homelessness (Pawson et al., 2024, p. 77). It is widely acknowledged that increased investment from service providers in early intervention and prevention measures for people at risk of experiencing homelessness can decrease overall system demand and enable services to adequately respond to the “growing and changing need” of homelessness (Pawson et al., 2024, p. 62; see also Department of Social Services, 2023). However, national research into SHSs indicates that homelessness prevention activities are often de-prioritised “out of the necessity to respond to the overwhelming demand at the crisis level”, with a trend towards services prioritising funding for people already experiencing homelessness (Pawson et al., 2024, P. 67).

In South Australia, demand for SHSs has increased considerably in recent years, with the Audit Office of South Australia (2024, p. 17) noting a 9% increase in the average of monthly clients between 2019-20 and 2022-23, and research by Jackson & Blane (2024, p. 13) demonstrating a 16% increase in the proportion of clients accessing homelessness services who are already homeless¹ in 2023-24, when compared with 2018-19. As seen in the FY2025-26 budget positions in Table 1, South Australia’s response to this increased demand and noted structural deficits is out of step with other states and territories, who have consistently prioritised and increased funding to homelessness services in the face of a nationally acknowledged housing and homelessness crisis (O’Neil, 2025).

At a time when homelessness services are not funded adequately to respond to current demand, let alone invest in prevention, research and sector development, there is tremendous value to the functions provided by homelessness peak bodies. As such, this paper summarises the role of homelessness peak bodies as advocates for the SHS sector and explores how a funded homelessness peak body could benefit South Australia. It outlines the structure and funding models of state/territory homelessness peaks and selected community service peaks, demonstrating the impact of dedicated homelessness peak bodies in achieving increased sector funding, resourcing and policy development. Additionally, the valuable role of state and territory homelessness peak bodies in working as partners with governments to reduce, prevent and end homelessness is evidenced.

NB: The crucial role of housing supply and access in preventing and ending homelessness is well documented (Productivity Commission, 2022; Department of Social Services, 2023; Pawson et al., 2024)

¹ In contrast to ‘at-risk of experiencing homelessness’.

– however, as the supply of housing is not determined by the SHS sector, this paper focusses on the areas of homelessness advocacy that are the responsibility of specialist homelessness services.

Table 1

State Government homelessness budget activities, FY2025-26²

State Government	25-26FY homelessness budget activities - summary	25-26FY - Figures
<u>VIC</u> (Department of Treasury and Finance, 2025a)	Continuing critical services to address homelessness and community needs	\$61m over 3 years
	Victorian Social Investment Model (VicSIM): enabling effective social policy and early intervention	\$5.4m over 2 years
<u>NSW</u> (NSW Treasury, 2025)	Ease pressure on crisis accommodation system ³	\$20m
	Early intervention expansion	\$10.4m
<u>NT</u> (Department of Treasury and Finance, 2025b)	Nil. NB: Due to the ‘extraordinarily high’ rates of homelessness in the NT reported in the 2021 Census, the NT received an increased allocation of Commonwealth funding for 2024-29 through the National Agreement of Social Housing and Homelessness (NASHH) (Pawson et al., 2024, p. 50).	
TAS⁴	Shekinah House: upgrade and expand services	\$100k
	Hobart Women’s Shelter	\$674k over 4 years
	Continuation of services for women facing homelessness (formerly Bethlehem House)	\$2.4m over 2 years
	New Bethlehem House: homeless shelter for men	\$2.8m over 4 years
<u>QLD</u> (Queensland Treasury, 2025)	Delivering crisis and transitional accommodation and frontline homelessness services	\$380m over 5 years ⁵
	20% funding uplift to Specialist Homelessness Services	\$209m over 4 years
	Housing and homelessness peak bodies	\$3.1m
<u>WA</u> (Government of Western Australia, 2025)	Supporting homelessness initiatives, including expanding assertive outreach services	\$20.4m (incl. \$10.4m for assertive outreach)

² For previous years’ homelessness policy development and budget positions across states, see pages 47-49 of the [Australian Homelessness Monitor 2024](#).

³ In addition to the \$527m support package for homelessness services delivered in the FY24-25 NSW budget.

⁴ NB: At the time of publication, the previously released budget papers for 2025-26 have lapsed due to the prorogation of Parliament and the dissolution of the House of Assembly. These amounts have been kept in as a guide only, noting they may differ from final budget activities.

⁵ Including a frontline service package of \$152m for FY25-26.

<u>ACT</u> (Australian Capital Territory Government, 2025)	Delivering accommodation and support services for people at risk of, or experiencing homelessness.	\$19.6m over 4 years
<u>SA</u> (Department of Treasury and Finance, 2025c)	Finalise the independent review of South Australia's homelessness system.	N/A – resourced out of existing budget.
	Undertake a review of South Australia's extreme weather response to ensure it is placed based and responsive to community needs.	N/A – resourced out of existing budget.
	Implement the Homelessness Outcomes Framework which was developed collaboratively with the specialist homelessness sector and includes a change management process for service delivery, capturing of outcomes and impact-based partnerships.	N/A – resourced out of existing budget.

The role of a peak body

“There is a critical role for homelessness sector peaks... in the goal of ending homelessness, bringing together communities and being an advocate for change at a national, jurisdictional and local community level” (Flatau et al., 2021, p. 203).

In 1995, the Australian Government’s Industry Commission defined a peak body as “a representative organisation that provides information dissemination services, membership support, coordination, advocacy and representation, and research and policy development services for its members and other interested parties” (181). Peak bodies have been a crucial component of the Australian community services sector for over 100 years and are classified as performing an “intermediary role between the sector and government”, with the potential to facilitate better social policy and service delivery (Industry Commission, 1995, p. 181).

The formation of peak bodies varies across sectors and industries; however it is generally agreed that they have a level of “representative legitimacy” (Staples, 2012, p. 41) that enables them to negotiate on behalf of an entire sector, playing a dual role of both “social reform (outward looking) and industry development (inward looking) functions” (ACT Government, 2021, p. 2). Peak bodies facilitate opportunities for the people directly impacted by the services they represent to have an “active say about the impact of social services and structures on them” (Quixley, 2006, p. 31), enabling lived experience consultancy and co-design to deliver “pragmatic service responses that meet the needs of its target population” (Clifford, Wilson & Harris, 2019, as cited in Constantine et al., 2024). As seen in Figure 1, the factors seen to most strongly influence the effectiveness of peak bodies are resourcing, accountability, autonomy and representativeness (Industry Commission, 1995).

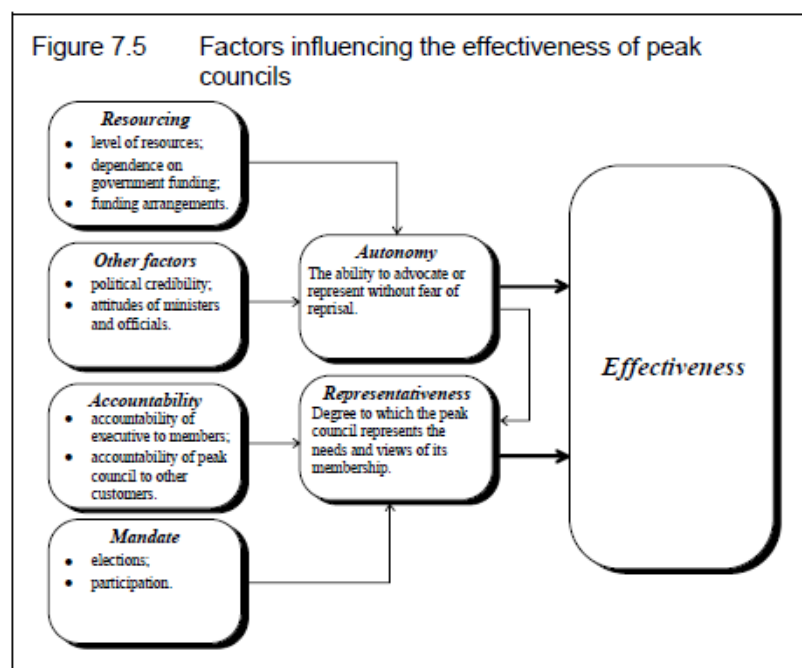
Within the SHS sector, homelessness peak bodies provide a fundamental service on both an individual and system level, acting as “a catalyst and advocate for the needs of both services providing support and individuals experiencing homelessness” (Flatau et al., 2021, p. 162). Collaboration is essential to addressing “wicked problems” (Smart, 2017, p. 18) such as homelessness, however it is well documented that collaboration between agencies is challenging, especially when services are not adequately funded to respond to current demand (Productivity Commission, 2022, p. 183). Crucially, homelessness peak bodies can provide a “collective industry voice” (Quixley, 2006, p. 20) for organisations, supporting collaboration through representing “interests rather than individuals” (Quixley, 2006, p. 11).

The proximity of homelessness peak bodies to direct service providers allows them to “undertake research in relation to client and industry needs, best practice and innovative models of service provision”, enabling the development of evidence-led, place-based initiatives (Community Door, n.d., para. 14). Without a peak body, the role of advocacy on behalf of the sector and the communities they serve can become the responsibility of non-government organisations (NGOs) and their frontline workers, which poses a risk of “pluralism” and bias in whose advocacy is heard, diminishing the voices of NGOs with fewer resources and capacity (Staples, 2012).

As outlined in Table 3, South Australia has several funded peak bodies who represent subsets of the community services sector. The South Australian Government recognises the importance of peak bodies in contributing to state government decisions, as demonstrated by the South Australian Funding Policy: “The South Australian Government will engage as early as possible with the NFP⁶ sector, including, as a minimum, the peak groups” (Department of Treasury and Finance, 2017, p. 6).

The government investment in, and associated outputs of homelessness peak bodies across Australia are profiled below (Table 2, 3 and 4); demonstrating the significant and ongoing efforts of homelessness peak bodies in improving the landscape of the homelessness sector, and contributing to state and national efforts to reduce, prevent and end homelessness.

Figure 1: Factors influencing peak bodies effectiveness



Note. From *Charitable Organisations in Australia* (Report No. 45), by Industry Commission, 1995, Australian Government Publishing Services. Copyright 1995 by Commonwealth of Australia.

⁶ Not-for-profit.

Table 2

Homelessness peak bodies (state/territory and national)

Peak	Funding (2023-24)	FTE (2023-24)	Purpose/function	Impact ⁷
Homelessness Australia (Homelessness Australia, 2024)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Non-government grant and projects (94%): \$213k Interest: \$11k 	1.0 FTE (+ 13 volunteers)	National peak body for homelessness in Australia. Systemic advocacy for the homelessness sector and work to strengthen the impact of homelessness services.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Successfully campaigned Federal Government for a permanent \$70m p/a increase in homelessness sector funding. Policy papers, consultation and submissions for the Federal Government's 10-year National Housing and Homelessness Plan and homelessness plan. Launched 'No-one turned away' – campaign for increased homelessness funding and released 'Call unanswered: Unmet need for homelessness services' report with Impact Economics. Co-hosted 2025 National Homelessness Conference (over 550 delegates and 70+ speakers) with Homelessness QLD.
Homelessness NSW (Homelessness NSW, 2024)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Government grants (84%): \$3.7m Membership fees: \$38k Interest: \$163k Conference income: \$384k 	13.0 FTE (10 full time, 5 part time)	Not-for-profit peak body for homelessness in NSW. Activities include developing Homelessness Census Data, Housing & Homelessness Dashboard, administering High Needs funding for Government Program and consumer advocacy/lived experience.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Coordination of Homelessness NSW Conference (420 delegates representing 70 organisations). Delivered 354 training courses (for 2893 people). Issued 570 pieces of accreditation support to sector. Successfully advocated for \$528m increase in homelessness funding, \$5.1 billion in new social homes and \$1 billion repair for social homes in NSW.

⁷ As per most recent (2023-24) Annual Report and associated documents.

Council to Homeless Persons (CHP) VIC (Council to Homeless Persons, 2024)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Government grants (69%): \$1.59m • Parity income: \$291k • Donations and other revenue: \$1.56m (incl fee for service \$510k) 	14.98 FTE (11 full time, 5 part time, 13 volunteers)	Peak body for homelessness in VIC. Also deliver the national homelessness publication, Parity.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Successfully advocated for: \$1 billion Regional Housing Fund, \$103.9m over 4 years in funding for SHS, \$45.4 million for Journey to Social Inclusion (J2SI) Housing First programs, 12 months funding for Pride in Place and Homelessness After Hours Services. • Delivering Industry Transition plan for the SHS; 45 training sessions completed, 15 online training programs created.
QShelter (QShelter, 2024)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Government grants (96%): \$6.9m • Fee for service: \$162k • Interest: \$60k • Donation & sponsorship: \$56k • Membership: \$32k 	24.71 FTE (20 full time, 7 part time)	Peak body for 'housing need and homelessness' in Queensland; part of the Housing and Homelessness Peaks' Partnership along with Homelessness QLD. Also advocates specifically for homelessness.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Successfully advocated for 20% increased funding to the specialist homelessness sector (SHS). • Conducted housing and homelessness workforce survey and developed report into workforce wellbeing and retention. • Developed Better Together: Q Shelter Policy and Investment Framework. • Conducts lived experience Community of Practice (COP).
Homelessness Queensland (Homelessness Queensland Inc, 2024)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Government grants (53%): \$155k • Other grants: \$132k • Donations: \$2.7k 	2.0 FTE (1 full time, 2 part time, 7 volunteers)	Not-for-profit homelessness peak body for the SHS sector in QLD; part of the Housing and Homelessness Peaks' Partnership (formally South Queensland Council to Homeless Persons).	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Partnered with QShelter to deliver sector wellbeing and retention programs. • Developing Specialist Homelessness Services Practice Framework. • Developing the Multidisciplinary Case Management Model. • Developed Outcomes Reporting Framework. • Co-hosted 2025 National Homelessness Conference with Homelessness Australia.

<u>Shelter WA</u> (Shelter WA, 2024)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Government grants (90%): \$2.8m • Donations: \$47k • Fee for service: \$131k • Membership fees: \$43k • Investments: \$66k 	14.5 FTE (7 full time, 10 part time)	Peak body for homelessness and community housing in WA.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Successfully advocated for \$92.2m boost in funding to homelessness services from state government. • Delivered Homelessness Week 2023 and 2024 activities, including provision of grant funding for regional events and initiatives. • Foundation member of Make Renting Fair campaign. • Member of WA Government Commissioning Working Group and Homelessness Commissioning Reference Group. • Submission to the National Housing and Homelessness Plan. • Codesign of Lived Experience project: Hear of my Experience (HOME). • Auspice the Western Australian Alliance to End Homelessness.
<u>Shelter TAS</u> (Shelter TAS, 2024)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Government grants (90%): \$527k • Memberships: \$37k • Fee for service: \$55k • Other grants: \$25k • Interest: \$4k 	3.52FTE (1 full time, 4 part time, 1 casual)	Not-for-profit housing and homelessness peak body in TAS.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Chair and convene specialist housing and homelessness services statewide forums. • Coordinates statewide homelessness week activities. • Independently fund project monitoring impact of short-stay accommodation in Tasmania. • Delivers Workforce Development Program for housing and homelessness sector. • Submissions to the National Housing and Homelessness Plan and other state discussion papers and policies.

<u>NT Shelter</u> (NT Shelter, 2024)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Government grants (94%): \$996k • Fee for service: \$17k • Investments: \$9k • Other: \$33k 	3.89 FTE (2 full time, 3 part time)	Peak body for affordable housing and homelessness in NT.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Successfully advocated for \$36.9m p/a increase in funding for homelessness services from the Federal Government. • Successfully advocates for funding for assertive outreach program in Alice Springs. • Member of NT Housing Alliance (provides advice to the Chief Minister). • Consultations and submissions to National Housing and Homelessness Plan, NT Housing and Homelessness Strategy and Homelessness Reform. • Convene Accommodation Action Group and Homelessness Response Group.
<u>ACT Shelter</u> (ACT Shelter, 2024)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Government grants (94%): \$364k • Membership: \$1.7k • Investments: \$17k 	2.26 FTE (1 full time, 2 part time, 6 volunteers)	Not-for-profit organisation providing advocacy and strategic advice on systemic issues affecting housing consumers in the ACT. Includes working across the broad area of homelessness; advocating for those who are homeless or at risk of homelessness.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Developed 'Working with people with high and complex needs in homelessness services & the ACT housing asset assistance program' evidence review. • Developed joint housing and homelessness election platform with ACT Council of Social Services. • Contributed to co-design of Commissioning for Better Outcomes from Housing and Homelessness Services process. • Submissions to the National Housing and Homelessness Plan and National Shelter and ACT Budget submissions.
<u>Homelessness SA</u> (End Homelessness SA Incorporated, 2024)	No reportable income	0.0 FTE (12 volunteers)	Volunteer-run organisation (Incorporated Association). The mission of Homelessness SA is to undertake advocacy, networking and community education on homelessness in South Australia.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Convenes frontline workers forum for sector development (NB: Homelessness SA received funding from SA Housing Trust to deliver this). • Coordinates community events in recognition of Youth Homelessness Matters Day and Homelessness Week.

Table 3

South Australian peak bodies (community services/non-SHS)

Peak	Funding (2023-24)	FTE (2023-24)	Purpose/function	Impact ⁸
<u>Embolden SA</u> (Embolden South Australia Inc., 2024)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Government grants (94%): \$178k (Office for Women) Organisational memberships: \$10k 	1.5 FTE ⁹	SA's peak body for specialist domestic, family and sexual violence (DFSV) services. (Formally the Coalition of Women's Domestic Violence Services SA). Currently auspiced by Women's Safety Services.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Successfully campaigned for a state Royal Commission into domestic, family and sexual violence. Submissions to National Housing and Homelessness Plan and Royal Commission into domestic, family and sexual violence. Represented DFSV sector in Royal Commission into domestic, family and sexual violence hearings and facilitated statewide consultation workshops. Coordinates annual vigils for Domestic and Family Violence Remembrance Day.
<u>Shelter SA</u> (Shelter SA, 2024)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Government grants: \$0¹⁰ Fee-for-service: \$137k Donations: \$13k Investments: \$1.7k 	1.0 FTE	Housing peak body in SA. Advocates for improved housing outcomes for South Australians living on low incomes and in housing need.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Submissions into the National Housing and Homelessness Plan, Parliamentary Inquiry into a Human Rights Act for South Australia, Federal Inquiry into the Worsening Rental Crisis Developed 'Moving On: How do tenancies end in the rental market?' report. Partnering with St Vincent de Paul Society SA and Westside Housing on 'Homeshare' service, voluntary service providing short-term housing to older single women.

⁸ As per most recent (2023-24) Annual Report and associated documents.

⁹ In 2024, Embolden's FTE was temporarily increased to 2.5FTE, to support the sector in developing submissions into the Royal Commission into domestic, family and sexual violence.

¹⁰ Until 2020, Shelter SA received annual funding from the South Australian Government. As per Shelter SA's capability statement (2024); *In March 2020, Shelter SA was advised that the State Government would no longer provide block funding to us.*

<u>SACOSS</u> (South Australian Council of Social Service, 2024)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Government grants (86%): \$2m (\$538k from DHS) • Fee-for-service: \$168k • Investments: \$104k • Other: \$24k • Donations: \$20k 	11.0 FTE (3 full time, 12 part time, 15 volunteers)	SACOSS is the peak body for the SA NGO-health and community services sector.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Successfully advocated for reforms to Residential Tenancies Act and government concessions, and public and community housing commitment. • 38 submissions and joint statements, including to the Inquiry into Australia’s Human Rights Framework, the Senate Inquiry on Worsening Rental Crisis. • Developed “Regional Rental Affordability” cost of living report and State budget analysis and submission. • Delivers DHS Sector Support Advocacy and Impact program.
<u>Community Housing Industry Association SA</u> (Community Housing Council of SA Incorporated, 2024)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Government grant (79%): \$400k • Fee-for-service: \$101k • Investments: \$2.3k 	1.7 FTE (2 part time, 7 volunteers)	Peak industry body for community housing providers and other not-for-profit housing providers in SA.	
<u>Community Centres SA</u> (Community Centres SA Incorporated, 2024)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Government grants (96%): \$844k (\$565k DHS, \$150k DIIS, \$128k other) • Fee -for-service: \$20k • Other: \$7k 	8.0 FTE (3 full time, 9 part time, 4 casual)	Not-for-profit peak organisation for the Community or Neighbourhood Houses or Centres Sector in SA.	
<u>SA Financial Counsellors Association (SAFCA)</u> (South Australian Financial Counsellors Association Inc., 2024)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Government grants (68%): \$615k (DHS) • Fee-for-service (30%): \$285k • Investment: \$15k 	3.6 FTE (1 full time, 4 part time, 12 volunteers)	The peak body for financial counsellors in South Australia and the Northern Territory.	

<u>Youth Affairs Coalition of South Australia (YACSA)</u> (Youth Affairs Coalition of South Australia, 2024)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Government grant (85%): \$468k (DHS) • Fee-for-service: \$9k • Memberships: \$17k 	3.8 FTE (1 full time, 4 part time, 20 volunteers)	Peak body for young people and the youth sector in South Australia.	
<u>Council on the Ageing SA (COTA)</u> (COTA SA, 2025)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Government grant (61%) \$1.56m (DHS) • Investments (24%): \$605k • Memberships: \$11.9k • Fee-for-service: \$196k • Other: \$144k 	14.25 FTE (3 full time, 17 part time, 4 casual, 110 volunteers)	Peak body for older South Australians, not-for-profit community organisation offering programs, information and services, as well as advocacy, policy and engagement.	
<u>Connecting Foster & Kinship Carers SA Inc</u> (Connecting Foster & Kinship Carers SA Inc., 2024)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Government grant (89%): \$711k (DCP) • Grants & donations: \$71k • Fee for service: \$6.8k • Interest: \$3k 	5.6 FTE (8 part time, 10 volunteers)	Independent peak representative body for foster and kinship carers across SA.	

Table 4

National peak bodies (community services/non-SHS)

Peak	Funding (2023-24)	FTE (2023-24)	Purpose/function
<u>National Shelter</u> (National Shelter, 2024)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Government grants: \$0 • Fee-for-service (89%): \$170k • Other: \$18k • Investments: \$1k 	1.0 FTE (10 volunteers)	National peak body working to improve housing outcomes for low-income Australians. Convenes the National Shelter Network.
<u>SNAICC (National Voice for Our Children)</u> (SNAICC, 2024)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Government¹¹ grants (49%): \$14.5m • Other grants and donations: (21%): \$4.9m • Conference income (8%): \$1.8m • Fee-for-service: \$128k • Interest: \$878k • Other: \$215k 	76 staff members ¹²	National non-government peak for Aboriginal children and families, conducting: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Research, policy and leadership 2. Community & sector voice 3. Sector development
<u>Australian Council of Social Service (ACOSS)</u> (ACOSS, 2024)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Government grants (33%): \$1.4m (Department of Social Services) • Other grants and donations (39%): \$1.7m • Fee-for-service (25%): \$1.08m • Investments: \$93k • Other: \$9k 	19.6 FTE (15 full time, 6 part time)	National peak council for community services; strategic priorities: participation and agency, income support and housing, employment, community services, climate and energy, tax and revenue.
<u>Australian Alliance to End Homelessness (AAEH)</u> (Australian Alliance to End Homelessness Limited, 2024)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Government grants (59%): \$1.5m • Contributions (24%): \$610k • Fee-for-service (10%): \$263k • Ticket sales: \$82k • Sponsorship: \$59k • Other: \$18k 	11.6 FTE (9 full time, 4 part time)	Independent advocates and network dedicated to ending homelessness in Australia. Delivers the Advance to Zero initiative in Australia.

¹¹ 47% Commonwealth govt, 2% state (ACT, WA, SA, NSW, NT)

¹² Specific FTE not available within 23-24 annual report.

Findings

Analysis of the funding structure, strategic priorities and advocacy impacts of homelessness and housing peak bodies across Australia produced the following findings:

1. Majority (or partial) government funding:

All homelessness peak bodies are largely (or solely) resourced by state and territory government grants and funding, with an average of 90% of funding provided by state and territory governments. Some peaks' funding comprises of multiple government funding contracts or project funding, such as Homelessness NSW, which has 4 government funding streams; the largest being the \$2m p/a 'Together Home' funding, which administers high needs packages and one-off funding grants.

2. Advocacy efforts:

In the past year, advocacy efforts from homelessness peaks has contributed to significant funding increases from state governments to SHSs; with Homelessness NSW advocating for a \$528m increase in homelessness funding, QShelter and Homelessness QLD advocating for a 20% increase in SHS funding, NT Shelter successfully advocating for double the funding for NT's SHSs, and Homelessness Australia successfully advocating for a permanent \$70m increase in SHSs funding nationwide.

The role and functions of homelessness peak bodies within states varies; all of them have a membership base and perform advocacy efforts on behalf of the homelessness sector to the state and federal government, but some (such as Homelessness NSW and Victoria's Council to Homeless Persons) deliver sector-wide services or direct service-delivery on behalf of their state's government. Most peaks convene sector reference groups, lived experience consultation and act as a direct line between the SHS sector and the state and territory government on matters of homelessness.

3. Staff:

The number of staff employed by peaks is proportionate to the amount of funding received, with the larger peaks (with funding of over \$1.5m p/a) employing, on average, 17.5 FTE. Smaller peaks (such as Homelessness QLD, which works in close collaboration with QShelter and as such receives limited funding) have a higher number of volunteers, e.g. Homelessness QLD (7 volunteers), ACT Shelter (6 volunteers), and Homelessness Australia (13 volunteers). As seen by the enormous impact of Homelessness Australia in their recent advocacy efforts, it is possible to achieve outcomes with limited resourcing, however it is clear that increased staffing enables greater engagement with the sector and government, and a wider scope of outputs and activities.

4. Sector Insights

Conversations with various stakeholders across the sector were held, including with:

- Kate Colvin (CEO, Homelessness Australia)
- Chris Burns (CEO, Hutt St Centre)

- Mary Leaker (General Manager, Embolden¹³)
- David Pearson (CEO, Australian Alliance to End Homelessness)
- Michael Chalmers (Chair, Homelessness SA)
- Dom Rowe (CEO, Homelessness NSW)
- Alice Clark (CEO, Shelter SA)

The South Australian Council of Social Services (SACOSS) was approached for a conversation, but this was not possible to coordinate prior to the finalisation of this report.

All conversations were guided by the same general discussion questions¹⁴, however each conversation was unique and produced different reflections and insights. An analysis of the conversations identified the following overall themes:

- **Continuity of knowledge:** Due to the transitory nature of government funded programs, it can be difficult to document and ensure the continuity of knowledge across programs and initiatives. Peak bodies can provide a whole-of-system timeline and ensure the legacy of programs that are no longer funded is retained and accessible for future reference (Kate Colvin, CEO Homelessness Australia).
- **Enabling collaboration:** Peak bodies enable collaboration across the sector for advocacy efforts, both to and with government. Without a peak body, the government will listen to the organisations with the loudest voice, which does not provide a cohesive or accurate representation of the sector overall and can lead to poor practice. Conversely, a peak body allows organisations to advocate for issues without threatening the sustainability of individual organisations.
- **National-level advocacy:** From a national perspective, South Australia's lack of peak body for homelessness poses a significant barrier, as stated by Homelessness Australia CEO, Kate Colvin:
"I don't know who to go to in SA if I need to connect with the SHS sector for advocacy efforts. From Homelessness Australia's perspective, there's a real benefit to having a homelessness peak body in SA, for communication as well as the dissemination of knowledge and ideas."
- **Preventing working in silos:** *"We need to reduce silos across sectors; if we don't have a peak body, services are so busy that some of that partnership-building and collaborative work falls by the wayside, because frontline services have limited capacity to do this work"* (Mary Leaker, General Manager Embolden SA).
- **Acting in the interest of government:** It was reported that state governments are interested in how peaks can be of use to them. This can be tricky due to navigating the position of being in the 'pocket' of government whilst also representing the NGO sector, peaks can see themselves as a partner to government, working together on critical issues for the sector:

¹³ Since consultation, Mary has accepted the role of CEO of Embolden (previously General Manager).

¹⁴ See Appendix 1: Questions for stakeholders.

“In a context where the system lacks capacity, the government appreciates a peak that sees its role as not just an advocate for the sector, but an expert consultant to government” (Dom Rowe, CEO Homelessness NSW).

- **Workforce resilience and practice:** Peak bodies create spaces for learning and connection across the workforce, in ways that aren’t possible within individual organisations due to resourcing, fear of repercussions and ‘everybody being in the same boat’. Peak bodies can facilitate networks for staff to collaborate and support one another through creative problem-solving, communities of practice and peer support.

“If I’m developing a national policy, I need to gather insights from each state, which is significantly more challenging without peak representation.”
(Kate Colvin, CEO Homelessness Australia)

4. Homelessness SA

As seen in Table 2, Homelessness SA is an unfunded, volunteer-run organisation. Homelessness SA primarily deliver sector development and networking activities, such as delivering forums for frontline workers, and coordinating events for homelessness days of significance. They provide valuable services to South Australia’s homelessness sector but are not resourced or structured to provide more formal peak representation.

5. The role of state and national Shelters, and Shelter SA

Noting that an adequate supply of appropriate, safe and affordable housing is a key factor in reducing and preventing homelessness, advocacy initiatives focussed on housing are inextricably linked with the interests of the SHS sector and homelessness advocacy (Productivity Commission, 2022, p. 188). National Shelter is the peak housing body in Australia, and as individual state peaks, the focus of state Shelter organisations varies; many Shelters act as both a peak body for housing and homelessness (ACT Shelter, NT Shelter, Shelter TAS and Shelter WA), or in close collaboration with smaller homelessness peak bodies (such as QShelter and Homelessness QLD). Consistent across states whose Shelter organisation functioned as combined housing and homelessness peak was an ongoing funding commitment/contract from associated state governments.

Shelter SA is South Australia’s peak body for housing. Historically, Shelter SA was funded by the state government, with reported income from state government grants in 2019-2020 at \$426,400. However, this funding contract ceased in 2020; as such, Shelter SA has been operating in an un-funded capacity over the past 5 years.

While Shelter SA’s core advocacy priorities, such as increased social housing, rights for renters and improved property standards are complementary to the scope of a SHSs peak body’s priorities, their primary focus is on housing-related interventions to address homelessness, rather than homelessness sector-specific priorities and advocacy. Shelter SA CEO, Alice Clark, shared that in the lead up to the

2026 State Election, Shelter SA will be developing an election platform, which will include priorities around homelessness and housing.

6. Other peak bodies

It is relevant to acknowledge the existence of peak bodies whose priorities naturally intersect with that of the homelessness system, such as the South Australian Council for Social Services (SACOSS). SACOSS is primarily funded by the state government (see Table 3) and has several advocacy priorities across the community services sector, including those of benefit to the homelessness sector (such as housing and cost-of-living). However, advocacy specifically focussing on the homelessness sector has not been a visible priority for SACOSS.

SACOSS' remit spans the entire community services sector, making them a powerful and supportive ally in advocacy, but not a homelessness sector peak. In the lead up to the 2026 State election, SACOSS have engaged a Policy Officer specifically focussing on housing homelessness and are convening a homelessness services roundtable to develop their election platform.

“Collectively, we want to address social problems. If we don’t have a peak body that can tell government what the sector’s experience is and work with government to strengthen the evidence-base for effective interventions, we are not in the best position to address those problems.”

(Mary Leaker, General Manager Embolden SA)

Conclusion

It is evident that homelessness peak bodies serve an important function in enabling whole-of-sector advocacy, innovation and research, and sector collaboration and development. They provide an avenue for individual organisations to advocate for their needs without fear of reputational or resourcing implications, and act as a powerful tool in enabling systemic change. The recent funding, policy and advocacy outcomes achieved by state and territory homelessness peaks is evidence of the benefit of peak bodies in supporting the SHS sector, and in turn, the communities they serve. For governments, peak bodies enable efficient and meaningful engagement with the homelessness sector, and are regarded as an important partner in reducing, preventing and ending homelessness in Australia. South Australia is the only state or territory in Australia that does not have a government-funded peak body for either housing¹⁵ or homelessness and is one of few states and territories that has not increased funding and resourcing to the SHS sector in recent years. This is a significant concern in the face of increasing demand for homelessness services and the worsening of the housing and cost of living crisis in South Australia. Additionally, with the recent federal announcement of increased funding for homelessness peaks, the lack of a dedicated homelessness peak body in South Australia poses a risk for South Australia's contribution to homelessness research, policy development and advocacy on not only a state, but a national level.

Whilst frontline service delivery is already severely under-funded in South Australia and the government's commitment to increase this is limited, investment in ongoing advocacy for the homelessness sector through a peak body is essential. Frontline services are only as good as the systems they operate in and are governed under; the current climate results in frontline services being forced to prioritise crisis responses, with little capacity to pursue strategic and advocacy initiatives, even within strategic-aligned roles, such as Alliance Senior Managers. Further to this, the ability for frontline services to operate under evidence-led, data-driven and best practice principles is contingent on the sector's capacity to engage with the policy, research and lived experience perspectives that inform this.

The creation of an effectively resourced peak body for homelessness in South Australia would not only provide the sector the much-needed avenues for advocacy and strategic advising but build the public's confidence in the state government's commitment to addressing the homelessness crisis. An increased and collective voice for South Australia's SHS sector would see benefits on individual, service and system levels, and enable us to lend our voice to the national conversation towards ending homelessness.

¹⁵ As of Shelter SA's defunding in 2020.

Recommendations

The following recommendations are underpinned by acknowledging the tireless self-advocacy, collaboration and innovation of the specialist homelessness sector in SA, and the work and partnerships with adjacent peak bodies and sector representatives.

Based on the above research and consultation, the suggested recommendation is:

1. South Australian Homelessness Advocacy Sub-Group:

- i. To share this paper with South Australian homelessness alliances, Directly Contracted Services and key sector partners.
- ii. To convene a meeting of sector representatives to review the recommendations and establish a South Australian Homelessness Advocacy Sub-Group.
- iii. For the South Australian Homelessness Advocacy Sub-Group to undertake further consultation and cost-benefit analysis to determine the preferred mechanism for a South Australian homelessness peak body, such as:
 - i. Engaging with Homelessness SA to determine the structural and funding changes needed to evolve into an accountable peak body for South Australia's homelessness sector;
 - ii. Determining the feasibility of 'allied' peaks such as Shelter SA or SACOSS to assume interim or ongoing responsibility for homelessness sector advocacy;
 - iii. Establishing a homelessness peak body, separate to existing organisations and peaks.
- iv. For the South Australian homelessness sector to petition the State and Commonwealth governments to fund an ongoing (majority) funding contract for the preferred homelessness peak body in South Australia.

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Appendix 1: Questions for stakeholders

- How is your organisation resourced?
- What have you been able to achieve? What has made this possible?
- What role do you see your organisation as playing in the wider social services sector?
- Do you collaborate with other organisations/bodies for advocacy efforts?
- What makes for a successful peak?
- Advice or suggestions re future advocacy for homelessness in SA?