



Community Housing Coalition of WA 



# HOMELESSNESS FORUM

Wednesday 12 December 2001

## Summary Notes

This paper summarises the main themes arising from of a forum on Homelessness in WA jointly sponsored by Shelter WA, the Community Housing Coalition of WA and the WA Council of Social Service. The forum was held on Wednesday 12 December 2001 in response to the Draft Report of the State Homelessness Taskforce. It was attended by some 25 people – see the Attendance List below.

### 1 Speakers

The forum commenced with three presentations on the State Homelessness Taskforce Interim Report to Government, which are summarised below:

- **WACOSS** : Leanne Barron
  - Need a specific strategy for Indigenous people. Any action plan will need benchmarks and indicators.
  - the appropriate social housing benchmark is 6% nationally. Achieving this benchmark will be a gradual, staged process.
  - need criteria for new developments to provide for affordable housing.
  - Public housing eligibility is tightened when housing is in crisis. There is a real danger of social housing becoming further residualised. Labour market insecurity is adding to demand for affordable housing.
  - Eviction recommendations do not go far enough. There needs to more dialogue and a moratorium on evictions.
  - Not clear whether stock transfers will result in increased private sector investment in affordable housing.
  - Community education needs to be expanded to recognise the complex interplay of affordable housing issues. Need to determine the extent to which the issues are structural and/or personal? What role does Indigenous shame play?

- **Community Housing Coalition:** Cathcart Weatherly
  - wanted specific actions.
  - can't be sure if taskforce will concentrate and still and actions added.
  - not a clear agenda .
  - lack of priority – what are the priority issues, costings, need ideas on funding.
  - stock transfers – transfers must have a strategic purpose that will ensure the growth of regional housing associations. If tenanted, a transfer should only proceed if the tenant agrees.
  
- **Shelter WA:** Karel Eringa
  - the report has the right words but no indication of timelines, costings or Priorities.
  - the report states that no further community consultations will be held yet there is a need for ongoing consultation. The community is expecting a specific action schedule from the taskforce.
  - there is no need for a resource and time inefficient “Implementation Committee”. If it is established it **MUST** have consumer representation.
  - The report lacks emphasis on the role of social housing in alleviating homelessness. Shelter supports the growth of community housing and recognises the niche it fills in the social housing sector. Areas that need attention are accountability measures, access and support. Any growth in community housing must not be at the expense of public housing.
  - Shelter supports calls for growth in public housing capital expenditure. Figures in report. Full matching funds from consolidated revenue. As the future of the CSHA is in doubt, separate and additional funding needs to be sought.
  - Renters – support concessions for community housing and should be expanded to private rental.
  - Need more research into the role of local government in the production of affordable housing.
  - The ongoing eligibility of Homeswest tenants is problematic in terms of under-occupancy, more... criteria, poverty traps and job insecurity. Debts to Homeswest are creating a sub-class of the permanent homeless. An evictions moratorium is needed.

## 2 Panel Discussion

The forum then gave an opportunity for the following questions and discussion from the floor:

- Regarding public housing capital spending:
  - \$35M as currently allocated for WA would see the proportion of stock continue to fall;
  - \$66M would stabilise the current proportion at 4.7%
  - \$156M each year for 10 years would bring the proportion to 6%
- Additional support for homeless people should be funded from Homeswest tenant bond fund in the form of increased tenant advocacy services. These services should be independent of the Department of Housing and Works.
- A cross-government response is needed to effectively address the issues.
- Cannot prioritise or budget without a clear idea of the size of the homelessness problem.

## 3 Workshops

- Access to Appropriate and Affordable Accommodation
  - any homelessness initiatives must be linked to the State Housing Strategy.
  - The special requirements in Regional and Remote areas must be recognised.
  - Back-up strategy where outcome depends on Commonwealth eg ensure a percentage of GST income is earmarked for housing .
  - Education of at-risk groups eg pensioners.
  - Does an additional \$11M of State funding depend on a Commonwealth funding increase of \$26M?
  - Need to know stats on numbers within target groups eg discrimination against single parents in the private rental market.
  - Need to improve access to housing by culturally and linguistically diverse people.
  - Need to identify the hidden homeless eg school age people.
  - The appropriateness and durability of Homeswest houses for specific needs.
  - The exclusion of people on certain incomes or with debts etc
  - Needs to investigate Homeswest policies that cause eviction and decrease evictions by increasing the funding and use of tenant advocates.
  - Need to address barriers to accessing affordable housing eg income, high rents and discrimination.
  - Moratorium on evictions to apply also to community housing as a condition of debate.

- Access to Supported Accommodation
  - Improving access of Aboriginal people to supported accommodation. The proposals to establish joint ventures and sobering up shelters were supported. With regard to the latter, there was seen to be an urgent need to establish alternative models which are appropriate for women with children.
  - Improving access for people with high and complex needs. In particular, a need was seen for services for women escaping domestic violence where there are other issues, e.g. mental health.
  - Establishment of a young single women's service for young women who have experienced abuse.
  - Establishment of a service for young mothers.
  - The need to review the SAAP model, i.e. to move away from communal living to separate on-site units, and the separation of tenancy management and support.
  
- Support, Assistance and Empowerment
  - change the report's wording to make it positive; include choice and flexibility.
  - ensure and support maintenance of permanent housing.
  - add Drug Court, health and aged care.
  - all support needs to be provided in conjunction with housing providers.
  - need to involve Indigenous support agencies and ensure culturally appropriate CaLD and Indigenous services are involved.
  - cross government financing is imperative to the success of any strategy. Funds are needed for training, supervision, administration while recognising the additional costs in regional areas.
  - as the strategy further diss-empowers people a moratorium on evictions is needed.
  - Provision of support and advocacy are separate to accommodation; Homeswest only currently funds the latter. Other programs like ACHA and the Tenancy Network need to be more broadly funded and adopted.
  - Could encourage Centrelink recipients to use Centrepay.
  - Costly and risky for workers – must be adequately funded.
  - Outreach is an appropriate direction for services, especially for people in transition.
  - Ensure aged care packages are directed toward reducing exploitation and abuse of older people.

- Information and education regarding independent living and for rights and responsibilities to made clear.
- Commonwealth funds should be used to allow Homeswest and other providers to produce more affordable housing.
- Wording such as “typical Australian Home” is patronising – there should be more assistance to manage a home.
- Existing services need to be adequately funded.
  
- Enhancing Implementation
  - need to rationalise committees; Implementation Committee not supported. A Cabinet Standing Committee should implement the Strategy.
  - there is a legislative requirement to resource and weight in favour of direct service providers on committees ( Ministerial Advisory Committees).

## Attendees<sup>1</sup>

Name	Organisation
Penny Williams	Mary Smith Refuge
Vicki Mills-Borley	Swan Emergency Accommodation
Denise Higginson	Gosnells CLC
Joanne Walsh	TAS
Denise Cusack	Individual
Tony Grealy	St Pat's Community Support
Alison Clements	Office of Seniors' Interests
Roma Lewis	CHCWA Board Member
Bernadette Kennedy	Individual
Glenda Williams	Changes Now Queens Park
Camille Inifer	TAS
Bronwyn Kitching	DCD SAAP Protocols
Alyson Szigligeti	Midlas
Arina Aoina	Womens Refuge Group
Gabriele Whiteley	Anawim
Pam Murray	Giz Watson's Office
John Gherardi	City Housing
Leanne Strommen	Homelessness Taskforce

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<sup>1</sup> Unfortunately this list is incomplete as not all attendees registered their attendance.