

ACKNOWLEDGING THE PREDICAMENT

DECEMBER 2008

WA Minister Sees the Problem

Recently the West Australian Treasurer, Minister for Housing and Commerce, Mr Troy Buswell, opened the State Tenancy Conference and addressed more than 60 community legal centre housing advocates and others from the non-government sector. Minister Buswell began by acknowledging the waiting list for public housing and also spoke of the review of the Rental Tenancies Act.

Media releases from the Minister in the days following announced outcomes of a recent audit of the location and condition of remote Aboriginal housing. Over 90% of the 2,400 houses inspected require upgrade, repair and/or connection to infrastructure and the bill is estimated in \$Billions. In another announcement, Minister Buswell reported the establishment of a taskforce to approach the provision of social housing in WA with an aspirational target of delivering 20,000 additional dwellings by 2020.

An additional 20,000 social housing dwellings by 2020 is consistent with the projections of need, identified by Shelter WA, the Community Housing Coalition, TAS and WACOSS for the *Creating Room* campaign earlier in the year.

Shelter WA welcomes these initiatives and congratulates the Minister for seeking to accurately quantify the problem, consult with and engage the community sector to develop solutions.



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WACOSS Pre-Budget Website

The Western Australian Council of Social Service (WACOSS), the leading peak organisation for the community sector, represents three hundred member organisations and affiliates, and 810 organisations involved in the provision of services to the community.

Each year, WACOSS provides a Pre-Budget Submission to State Government, which outlines its key priority recommendations for how funding should be allocated. In the 2009-2010 Budget WACOSS makes a number of recommendations to meet the immediate and pressing needs of the community. The cornerstone of this years submission is primarily aimed at increasing the supply of social housing, crisis accommodation and homelessness services. It is emphasised that there can be no meaningful attempt to address social disadvantage without addressing the housing shortage. It calls for a restoration of public and community housing stock to 6% of the total housing stock in WA by 2020 and increasing the number of crisis accommodation places by 50%, or approximately 350 beds.

The submission is derived from broad consultation with representative peak bodies and developed in collaboration with them. A detailed exploration of the priority issues, together with a complete list of recommendations can be found in the WACOSS 2009-2010 Pre-Budget Consultation Report. This report is available online at <http://www.wacosscampaigns.org/>.

Study Seeks Male Victims of Domestic Abuse

Interviewing men who have been abused plus family and friends and service providers has commenced for this project undertaken by the Mens Advisory Network.

The abuse may have taken various forms including physical, intimidation, threats, sexual, emotional, psychological, financial, property damage and social isolation

Anyone wishing to participate in the study should contact Emily Tilbrook at Edith Cowan University on 0414 807 911

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Shelter WA's New Research Manager

Ray de Silva has joined Shelter WA as the new research manager. Ray's background is in sustainable development and community-based initiatives. He has had exposure to a wide range of experiences spanning government, business academic and non-government in Western Australia and in developing countries for over 17 years. Ray joins Shelter from LandCorp where he was the Manager for Sustainability and Community Well-being. Prior to that, Ray served as a teacher and researcher at Curtin University for nearly 5 years.

Shelter WA is pleased to have Ray join us and looks forward to exploring opportunities to integrate Ray's expertise in sustainable community development with WA Social Housing policy.



Shelter WA staff members left to right Ray, Bronwyn and Corinne

COAG, NAHA and Housing

The Council of Australian Governments (COAG) held its 24th meeting in Canberra on 28 and 29 November 2008. The Prime Minister, Premiers, Chief Ministers and the President of the Australian Local Government Association, were joined by Commonwealth, State and Territory Treasurers. The meeting was held amidst uncertainty and concern following the recent turbulence in the global economy and financial markets.

As part of the Australian Government's National Reform Agenda, COAG will replace 92 Specific Purpose Payments (SPPs) to States with 5 National Partnership Payments (NPP's). The NAHA is one of these. Most COAG attention and budget focused on health and education (\$60.5 billion). However, the new National Affordable Housing Agreement (NAHA) was adopted by all federal, state and territory governments in the area of homelessness, social housing and remote indigenous housing.

The NAHA will commence on 1 January 2009, with implementation plans to be finalised by 1 April 2009. According to the Government it will include:

- Australia's network of homeless services, the Supported Accommodation Assistance Program (SAAP), responsible for helping almost 190,000 people every year¹

- Public, community and other housing provided under the previous Commonwealth-State Housing Agreement (CSHA), and
- A number of other programs, such as the Commonwealth Rent Assistance Scheme.

The homelessness aspect of the housing agreement appears to be the strongest. An extra \$800 million over four years (half coming from the States), combined with a focus on early intervention and prevention, is to be committed towards meeting the stated goals of "a 50 per cent reduction in homelessness, an end to rough sleeping by 2020, and implementing a policy of 'no exits into homelessness' from statutory or custodial care for those at risk of homelessness."²

These targets are also expected to be part of the Government's homelessness white paper, which is likely to be released before the end of 2008. The inclusion of additional support to greatly stretched homeless services in the new housing agreement between the federal, state and territory governments is encouraging. Also the Government has announced a specific \$1.94 billion commitment to remote indigenous housing and to eliminate the incidence of people becoming homeless after leaving state or custodial care.

Any increase from the Federal Government is welcome, however, compared to actual demand for public and community housing, allocated funds fall short of addressing the need over the next ten year period. From a West Australian perspective the results are particularly disappointing. The two-year allocation of

¹ AIHW 2008, *Homeless People in SAAP: SAAP National data collection annual report 2006-07*, p.9

² COAG (2008) COAG Meeting communiqué 2008, Attachment C p.8

\$400 million, towards social housing (which includes community and public housing) is meant to *"increase the supply of social housing through new construction, providing approximately 1600 to 2100 additional dwellings by 2009-10."* This falls well below expectations of housing advocates across Australia. We have argued that social housing needs are near crisis level and that over the next 10 years a multi-billion dollar commitment was needed. About 175,000 households are waiting for public housing in Australia. In Western Australia alone, the waiting list for public housing is soon expected to be at 20,000³.

The same can be said for remote Indigenous housing. Around \$167 million a year is to be provided by the Commonwealth over the next ten years, which is meant to provide up to 4,200 new houses in remote Indigenous communities and upgrades and repairs to around 2,400 existing houses in WA.

The agreement also clarifies that the States have responsibility as *"the main deliverer of housing in remote Indigenous communities, providing standardised tenancy management and support consistent with public housing tenancy management."* This increase offers a positive step. However; the allocation does not deliver funds for community infrastructure and utility connections as well as the upgrade and repair of the existing social housing stock in remote and rural WA. According to DHW, the cost of ensuring that these basic needs were taken care of would easily run into the \$ 1 billion range.

While the COAG efforts are a step in the right direction, there is not enough evidence that housing and the issues surrounding homelessness have been examined in a systemic and coordinated way. More thought could have gone in to understanding how the targets set in the NAHA and Indigenous housing programme integrate with other programs and other consolidated SPPs. In this respect it can be said that the opportunity to develop truly coordinated approaches to address sustainable housing outcomes, such as health and education have not been maximised.

As part of the implementation plan, it would be good to see COAG allow flexibility in adapting or modifying the strategy. This would be important in the likely event that the set targets are not met. The NAHA may need review and funding targeted to priority areas as a result. It is early days yet, but the success of a strategy is dependent upon the structure and substance of the processes that sit beneath it and COAG is no exception.

National Rental Affordability Scheme

The Australian Government is offering incentives to build up to 4,000 new affordable rental properties across the country in the first round of the National Rental Affordability Scheme (NRAS). Under the scheme, the Australian Government has combined with State and Territory Governments to offer incentives to institutional

investors and housing providers. The objective of the scheme is to build properties which will be rented out at 20 per cent below market rate and ultimately seek to:

- increase the supply of affordable rental dwellings;
- reduce rental costs for low to moderate income households; and
- encourage large scale investment and innovative delivery of affordable housing.

This Scheme is a key component of the Federal Government's \$3.7 billion housing package to boost rental stocks and lower housing infrastructure costs for some entry level housing.

The National Rental Affordability Scheme offers annual incentives for a period of ten years. The two key elements of the incentive are an annual Commonwealth Government incentive of \$6,000 for each dwelling in the form of a refundable tax offset or payment. Additionally, an annual State or Territory government incentive of \$2,000 or more for each dwelling, which will be provided through cash payments or in-kind financial support.

Letters of offer for 2,800 National Rental Incentives were sent out on Thursday 4 December 2008 to 31 successful applicants. All of the 401 incentives proposed by Western Australian applicants for the first round were successful and offers were made. These applicants have 28 days to respond to the offer so that incentives may be allocated.

The emphasis on a mixture of dwellings and a range of different homes – apartments, townhouses and houses – within developments is noteworthy given that the accommodation needs of families, seniors and other households vary significantly. The Minister driving the initiative Tanya Plibersek said: *"Properties will be rented out at 20 per cent below market rate and we're keen to see low to moderate income workers such as those in childcare, retail and hospitality able to afford to live in areas where their skills are needed. We're expecting to see the first families moving into NRAS homes in coming weeks."*

Round Two call for applications opens on Monday **15 December 2008** and will close on **Friday 27 March 2009**. An **Information session** will be held on **Tuesday 10th February 10 am - 12 noon** at **WA Art Gallery 47 James Street Mall, Perth**.

Up to 1.5 million households will be eligible to be tenants under the Scheme. If market demand remains strong, another 50,000 incentives for a further 50,000 affordable rental dwellings will be made available over five years from July 2012. These offers, if accepted, will provide further stimulus to the housing construction industry. Industry experts say these current offers could create more than 7,000 jobs in the housing construction sector.

³ Confirmed by DHW at TAS Conference Dec 11th 2008

State Tenancy Conference 9th and 10th December 2008.

The State Tenancy Conference was organised by the Tenants Advice Service WA (TAS) and consisted of a range of Western Australian stakeholders from government, not for profit and the private sector. The conference explored Western Australian residential tenancy issues. In his opening address to the conference, the Minister for Housing, Troy Buswell confirmed that the waiting list for public rental housing stood at 18,815 applicants, whereas public housing stock had only grown by 270 houses per annum. The inevitable stress caused by this gap was also related to a series of longstanding systemic issues.

An overview of current and emerging tenancy issues across the state revealed consistent patterns. This was validated by representatives of TAS' WA legal and advocacy networks. Reports of overcrowding, unaffordability and an overall lack of available housing were among the main issues. Practices exacerbated by low vacancy rates and high market demand include landlords capitalising on tenant vulnerability and lack of choice and, families struggling with higher costs of living and insecure employment. Delegates discussed a lack of responsibility from both sides in some cases with tenant anti-social behaviour and an unregulated sector of private landlords.

A diverse range of guest speakers allowed academic as well as policy, legal and service-oriented representatives to share developments in their respective areas with participants and took questions. On day one, speakers from the State Administrative Tribunal (SAT), WACOSS, DOCEP and the Equal Opportunity Commission (EOC) elaborated on tenants issues in Western Australia.

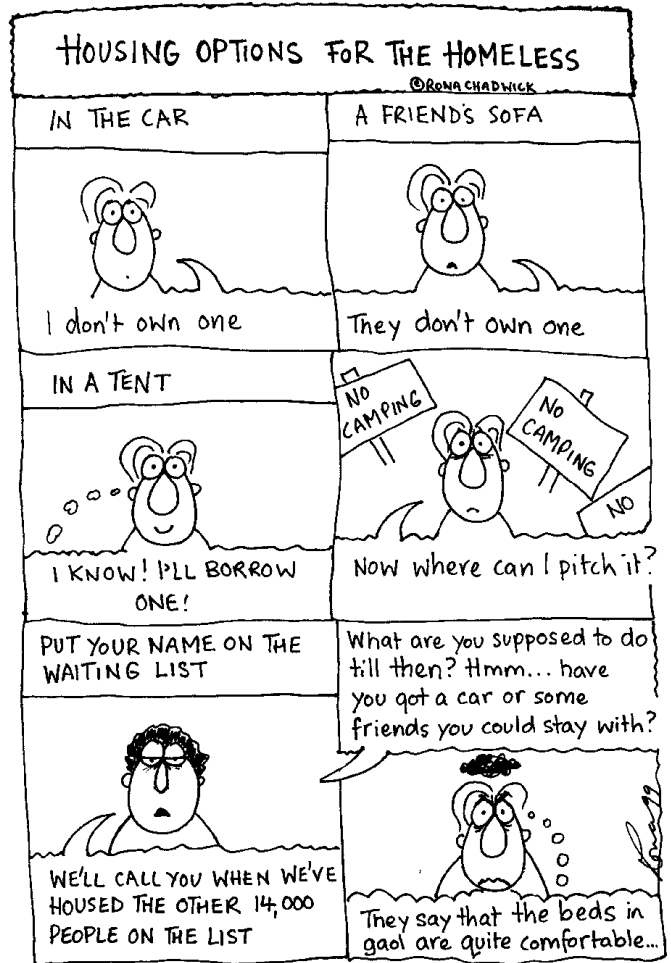
A consistent theme which ran through these talks was of providing more affordable, timely opportunities for redress in situations requiring assistance, education and justice. Consumer disadvantage and detriment were examined for humanitarian entrants and emerging communities CALD, Indigenous, Seniors and Youth.

Day two delivered sessions from AHURI, Department of Housing and Works, the West Australian newspaper, DOCEP and REIWA on sustaining efforts to enable individuals and families to maintain their tenancies.

This theme underlined the disadvantage of people not able to maintain their tenancy for a variety of reasons. A range of programmes across the service landscape are aimed at educating tenants and landlords as well as service providers. Reference was made to the relative progress in Western Australia in terms of the range of programs in action. Despite the commitment of community service programs, it was noted that these were under severe pressure and that the immediate issue of a lack of housing supply prevented effective solutions.

The Conference resolved to bring these issues to the attention of the Minister in the form of resolutions. The

conference was well attended and proved informative and beneficial to all.



Swan Accommodation Providers' Network

The City of Swan held an accommodation providers' network on 18th Nov 2008 | Midland. The objective was to discuss short term measures for addressing the housing. Approximately 2,000 people in the Swan district are presently in need of and/or appear on a waiting list for housing. Approximately 300 of these are categorised as having crisis accommodation needs.

It was agreed that an assessment needs to be made of available rental and other housing stock options. Amongst the options considered were caravan parks and pre-fabricated transportable homes which are generally easy and quick to assemble. The pros and cons of these two options were discussed and would be further investigated involving the following initial actions:

- A comprehensive mapping exercise needs to be conducted of housing needs and the add-on services that are required at present.
- A mapping of the stakeholders in the field is also seen as necessary. This will provide a better idea of who is doing what and whether there is any overlap in effort. It will also help distinguish the services delivered v/s what they say they do. They are also to refer to others which they feel are to be included as part of the housing/social justice scene in the region.

➤ This data needs to be cross-referenced with statistics from other agencies.

In summary, there was support for a more community-oriented development to happen as opposed to a bricks and mortar only solution. It was also stipulated that planning should provide for a mix of dwellings as opposed to a one-block solution based on the assumption that one-size fits all.

To contribute to further deliberations contact Community Development Coordinator Daniel Hanley at the City of Swan: Daniel.Hanley@swan.wa.gov.au



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Gosnells East Metro Housing Forum

The Gosnells Community Legal Centre held a forum on 28 Nov with local providers and stakeholders to share information and explore responses to housing need in the area. Unanimously providers felt stretched and ineffective when unable to locate appropriate secure and affordable accommodation for people seeking this help, and reported that the time-consuming process of contacting and advocating to emergency and crisis agencies on behalf of clients only to gain a bed for one-night was frustrating.

Sadly, myths prevail amongst local government representatives who believed that the City of Gosnells had a high proportion of rental accommodation in comparison with other areas. This belief fostered an unsympathetic attitude toward development of affordable residential rental construction.

When ABS data was accessed it shows on the contrary, Gosnells and surrounding areas have a high proportion of people purchasing their homes in comparison to the region and Australia wide and very low rates of rental or higher density forms of housing including units, villas and townhouses. ABS data also revealed that Gosnells has more families and young people than average and that employment and income levels are similar to Australian averages.

To access the summary from the Forum or to contribute to further deliberations contact Gosnells Community Legal Centre Marion Leach on (08) 9398 1455 or email at marion@goscl.com.au

EOC Investigation into Discrimination in Private Rental

In July 2008, The WA Commissioner for Equal Opportunity launched an investigation into whether there is racial discrimination in the private rental market, calling for submissions from individuals, organisations assisting tenants, home owners and estate agents. The investigation, pursuant to Section 80 of the Equal Opportunity Act 1984 will assess whether persons from ethnic minority backgrounds and Aboriginal people are discriminated against on the basis of their race either directly or indirectly in the private housing rental market.

The EOC anticipates that submissions can help identify possible causes and appropriate remedies for addressing race based discrimination in the private rental industry. "We anticipate looking not just at outright incidents of racial discrimination, but also some of the practices within the industry that may inadvertently exclude people of various ethnic backgrounds such as the language used in forms and advertising," the Commissioner said.

A significant statistic from the EOC is that approximately 40% of discrimination complaints received by the Commission in the area of accommodation are on the grounds of race. The final report is due in March next year pending a few more consultations in WA's regions.

It is to be noted that in 2004, the Equal Opportunity Commissioner conducted an inquiry into whether Aboriginal people experienced discrimination (direct or indirect) in WA public housing (Homeswest). The 'Finding a Place' Report contained 165 recommendations and requires comprehensive changes to the practices and policies of the Department in it's response to Aboriginal housing disadvantage. Implementations of the recommendations from this report continue to be closely monitored by the EOC Section 80 Public Housing Implementation and Monitoring Committee. The Finding a Place Report can be found on the EOC website: <http://www.eocwa.wa.gov.au/pdf/findingaplace.pdf>



2009 Homeless Connect Event

Volunteering WA in partnership with The City of Perth organised an event which brought together homeless people and service providers in the central city. Perth's first Homeless Connect, on November 26 2008 was inaugurated by the City of Perth's Lord Mayor Lisa Scaffidi at the Citiplace Community Centre. The aim of the initiative was to provide a one-stop-shop that enabled homeless people living on the streets or without permanent accommodation to access a range of services in one central place.

The event brought together government and non-government agencies, 100 volunteers, businesses, and over 40 service providers (special interest, community groups and individuals). Guests were able to select donated clothing, food, toiletries and other goods. Personal care services such as showers, meals hairdressing, podiatry, optometry, medical services and massage were also provided on the day.

Homeless Connect originated in the United States in October 2004, where 278 volunteers in downtown San Francisco engaged in a survey of the homeless and struck on the idea of a day of greeting, coordination and co-location of a variety of social services to address the needs of the disadvantaged.

"The City and Volunteering WA combined their resources to make the event happen and all those involved in ensuring its success are to be strongly commended" said Mayor, Lisa Scaffidi. *"While Homeless Connect is just for a day, the awareness of the services and providers that can be accessed will be of longer-term benefit to those who have visited Homeless Connect."*

The Homeless Connect US counterpart is now a bi-monthly event where the provision of services involves volunteers working to connect people with: Dental Services, Family Services, Food, HIV testing, Housing Information, Hygiene Products, Medical Care, Mental Health Services, Methadone, Needle Exchange and much more.

Gimme Shelter 2009

The inaugural Gimme Shelter took place in February 2008 at the Fremantle Arts Centre. Over 1,000 people turned up for a concert on the south lawn with great local bands, speeches and entertainment including St Pat's own Starlight Hotel Choir. St Pat's and other organisations which provide support for the homeless, had information stalls and the Gimme Shelter wristband appeal was launched. The night was an overwhelming success both financially and in terms of raising awareness.

The second Gimme Shelter will take place on Saturday 21st February 2009 at the picturesque at the Fremantle Arts Centre, with rising local stars Abbey May and The Rockin' Pneumonia along with the Dream State Circus already confirmed for the second instalment of Gimme Shelter.

The organisers are hoping that again this year the local community will get right behind the event and help make it even more successful. If anyone is interested in becoming a sponsor, helping spread the word through your networks, helping out on the night, if you are an NGO having an information stall - or becoming involved in any way then please get in touch with Victor Crevatin by email vcrevatin@stpats.com.au.

Upcoming Events

- **The Homelessness White Paper** due to be released late December 2008
- **State and regional WA data breakdown from Counting the Homeless 2006** due in February
- **A Draft Bill to replace the current Residential Tenancies Act 1987** that addresses gaps for tenant consumer protection in the areas of rent increases, security of tenure, option or application fees and uniform mandatory minimum standards
- **Centrelink Income Management** trial now implemented in the Cannington region to be reported on at the next Centrelink Community Consultation Committee in 2009, along with the establishment of a **Centrelink Homelessness Reference Group**
- More work from the **Housing Crisis Committee for Culturally and Linguistically Diverse Communities** advocating for better housing outcomes for newly arrived refugees and humanitarian entrants. Progress on the DOCEP project **for development of a resource package** including a DVD on tenancy matters for newly arrived migrants
- News about more **Caravan Park Closures** and an appropriate housing response for seniors who are forced to re-locate
- The consultation on the **Legislative Framework for Community Housing** – closing date now extended to 19th January 2009. A breakfast forum is being held for Community Housing Providers to discuss and comment on the Framework on **Thursday, January 15**. For more information contact Daniel Guise at CHCWA on bpu@communityhousing.org.au and to access the background paper and draft framework see: www.dhw.wa.gov.au/400_2081.asp
- Responding to **Native Title and Aboriginal Heritage** issues that can cause delays to negotiations for land on which to site houses, schools, hospitals and police facilities in remote communities adding substantial additional costs. "A simpler and more cost effective solution needs to be found, given the critical needs of indigenous communities and the pressure for increased commitment to provide them with essential services," Mr Buswell said.

Upcoming Events (continued)

- Supporting **Dr Graham Jacobs** the new WA **Minister for Mental Health** in the establishment of
 - A **Commissioner for Mental Health**
 - A **comprehensive review** of WA Mental Health services
 - Development of a **WA Mental Health Strategic Plan** that will integrate with the 4th National Mental Health Policy and Strategic Plan
- Progress on the **Pensions Review** and the **National Tax Review** (the Henry Report) which will include exploration and evaluation of the treatment of housing in national tax policy

THE TEAM AT SHELTER WA WISH ALL MEMBERS, SUBSCRIBERS, HOUSEHOLDS AND STAKEHOLDERS A HAPPY FESTIVE SEASON AND BEST WISHES FOR 2009

Shelter WA

Shelter WA is Western Australia's independent peak housing organisation. Shelter represents the views of consumers and community groups on major housing issues.

Shelter WA aims to ensure that every person has access to affordable, appropriate, secure and safe housing that is free from discrimination.

We do this through:

- coordinating and representing community sector views to government;
- developing and responding to policy;
- providing education and information; and
- promoting alternative housing models.

Newsletter Production

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