

## EDITORIAL: THE FUTURE OF THE CSHA

by Karel Eringa

The Commonwealth State Housing Agreement (CSHA) is an agreement between the Commonwealth and State and Territory governments, which "aims to assist both renters and purchasers obtain appropriate accommodation". Nearly all capital funding for social housing is managed through the CSHA.

Recent Shelter WA consultations have revealed significant community concern over falling capital spending on social housing,<sup>1</sup> as evidenced in Figure 1. This figure indicates that over the last decade Federal funding priorities have been shifting from CSHA assistance to Commonwealth Rent Assistance (CRA).

Negotiations for the next (2003-2006) CSHA are underway as the current CSHA ends in 2003. At the Housing Ministers' Conference of 19 April 2002, the Australian Housing Ministers examined an Options Paper relating to three scenarios for the future of the CSHA. The first two scenarios maintained the existing

CSHA framework, but with reduced funding and a reduced and a reduced ability to meet identified housing objectives.

The third scenario, however, raised the possibility of revitalising the social housing sector, turning around the current trends of contraction and residualisation. This scenario creates a recurrent stream of funding for State Housing Authorities, in essence by making public housing tenants eligible for Commonwealth Rent Assistance. Similar to the situation with regard to community housing providers, rent assistance funds would flow from the tenant to the provider because of the link between rent and income. 'Top up capital payments' from the Commonwealth Government and private investment would provide possibilities for growth.

At the time of writing this article, it is becoming apparent that some variant of the third scenario would be adopted as the basis for the next CSHA. It is therefore worth examining the advantages and drawbacks of this scenario.

### *Scenario 3: A Revitalised Social Housing System*

The major advantage of Scenario 3 is the increased certainty of revenue streams to social housing providers: rather than having to rely on the outcomes of three-yearly negotiations, the income stream from rent assistance is ongoing subject to rent assistance continuing.

In addition, since many public housing tenants would be eligible to receive rent assistance, this scenario is likely to reduce the current negative impact of targeting on the financial viability of public housing providers.

Finally, making public housing tenants eligible for rent assistance would solve a horizontal equity issue between tenants in private rental and community housing on the one hand, and public housing on the other.



### **Elsewhere In This Issue**

- Homeswest Page(s): Policy Information and Updates .....3
- National Shelter Update .....3
- Letter from Bob Thomas .....4
- Forum Report: Youth Housing and Social Exclusion in WA .....5
- Final Report: Homeswest's Debt Policy .....6
- Recent Publications .....6
- HAC Update .....10
- A year on and demand from Homeless People continues .....11

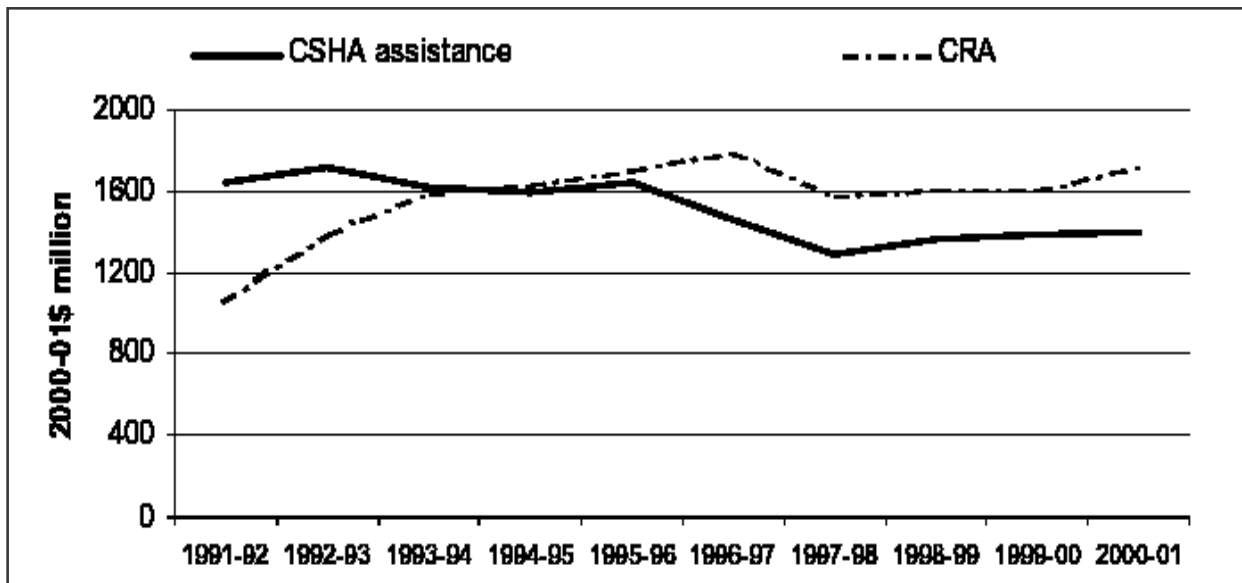


Figure 1: CSHA and CRA assistance, 1991-2001

However, there are also a number of drawbacks to Scenario 3:

- 1 The amount of funds transferred from the Commonwealth to the States through rent assistance for public housing tenants would be much smaller than the current funds transferred under the CSHA. The Commonwealth Government should therefore make a commitment that the sum of recurrent funding through rent assistance and top up capital funding through the CSHA will not fall in real terms.
- 2 The future of rent assistance is not set in concrete; although unlikely, future governments might change the eligibility criteria for rent assistance, or reduce the payment structure or amounts. Hence the Commonwealth Government should make a commitment that rent assistance payments will not be reduced and eligibility criteria not be tightened for at least a decade.

Private investment in social housing will not expand significantly if there are any doubts

regarding the future of rent assistance.

- 3 The current system of rental assistance thresholds means that it will become even less attractive for public housing providers to house certain groups of tenants. For instance, under the 25% of income rule, an unemployed couple with one 6 year old and one 14 year old child currently pays \$183.33 per fortnight in rent. This would increase to \$263.32 (including \$79.99 in rent assistance) if the couple becomes eligible for rent assistance. However, because of the threshold a single young person receiving Youth Allowance would continue to pay \$69.82 per fortnight, as s/he would not receive any rent assistance.

Accordingly the Commonwealth Government should revise the current rent assistance system to make it a payment that explicitly aims to increase housing affordability for people on low incomes. This could be achieved by lowering or, preferably, abolishing rent assistance thresholds.

#### The Way Forward

Despite the drawbacks identified above, Shelter WA believes that in principle, making public housing tenants eligible for rent assistance is preferable to the current system. This is because it would provide a stream of relatively reliable recurrent funding to public housing providers, and resolves certain problems with horizontal equity.

#### Footnote

<sup>1</sup> Hal Bisset, *Social Housing: Building a New Foundation - Social Housing Innovations Project Consultants Report to the Office of Housing Department of Human Services Victoria*, November 2000

*This article is a summary of The Future of the CSHA: Shelter WA Occasional Paper 2002-1. The full version of this paper is available on the Shelter WA website: [www.shelterwa.org.au](http://www.shelterwa.org.au)*

# The Homeswest Page(s): Policy Information and Updates

## 1 Pets

On 20 March 2002 the Hon Premier announced tough new regulations, to apply from 22 April 2002, covering the ownership and handling of pit bull terriers and certain dangerous dog breeds to balance the need for public safety, the welfare of the animal and the rights of animal owners. This also includes mixed breeds, which contains pit bull terrier. The Department has therefore changed its tenancy agreements and pets policy as follows:

### Tenancy Management

22. Tenants may have a cat or dog only if the accommodation has an enclosed yard and if the local authority by laws are not contravened

22.1 Tenants are not permitted to keep a dog that is listed on the Government's Dog (Restricted Breeds) Regulation 2002 (includes Pit Bull Terrier and Pit Bull Terrier Cross Breeds).

22.2 Existing tenants as at 22 April 2002 who own a dog that is listed on the Government's Dog (Restricted Breeds) Regulation 2002 may retain the dog/s. It is the tenant's responsibility to ensure the dog/s are kept in an

enclosed and escape proof confinement. Fences at all times are to be kept in good repair and ensure the signage conforms to that provided for in the Third Schedule Part 3 of the Dog Regulations 1976 is displayed at each entrance to the property. The signage is "warning dangerous dog". The cost of the signage and escape proof confinement will be at the dog owner/s expense

22.3 The dog/s can only be kept for the life of the dog. The dog/s cannot be replaced by another dog listed on the Government's Dog (Restricted Breeds) Regulation 2002.

22.4 Failure to comply with the new regulations will result in the Department referring the matter to the Local Government authority for action under the Dog Act 1976.

The Department requires all our existing tenants who currently keep a restricted breed dog (i.e. Pit Bull Terrier and Pit Bull Terrier Cross Breed) to give the Department immediate written notification advising you are keeping a dog listed on the Government's Dog (Restricted Breeds) Regulation 2002. This is

to ensure that tenants understand their responsibility in keeping of a restricted breed dog/s and the appropriate signage is displayed at the property. Should you seek further information on this matter please contact your Accommodation Manager or your nearest Department of Housing and Works office.

## 2 Visitors to Homeswest Properties and Persons Moving in Permanently

Homeswest allows visitors to stay for a period of up to 8 weeks before they are regarded as a resident of the household for rent purposes. A person who moves into a property with the sole purpose of residing there permanently then the rent will commence from that date not 8 weeks after. A new rental subsidy form should be completed and income provided for all those residing in the property. Tenants are required to advise Homeswest immediately of any changes to household composition or in the event that the household income increases or decreases by \$10 per week or more. Homeswest will backdate the rental payments should a tenant not provide the correct information on household members and income.

## National Shelter Update *by Karel Eringa*

I attended the March National Shelter Council Meeting (NCM) on behalf of Shelter WA. The most important item discussed was that of funding: National Shelter has operated without core funding for the last six years. Nevertheless, the organisation continued to produce its journal and broadsheet, as well as its lobbying and policy work. In essence, the organisation operated at levels of activity that it knew to be unsustainable in expectation of funding being restored "after the next election".

Unfortunately, funding has so far not been restored and there are no indications that it will be in the near future. In order to secure the organisation's future, the NCM made a decision to balance the budget. Specifically, it was decided to limit activities as follows:

- Two broadsheets per year, edited, printed and distributed by State Shelters.
- Journals will only be produced when sponsorship money can be obtained.

- NCMs, phone hookups, lobbying and policy work, funded from membership fees.

It is important that National Shelter continue functioning at its reduced level, since it is the only organisation that provides a voice for housing consumers on a national level at a time when home ownership and private rental are becoming increasingly less affordable, public housing stock is falling in all States and Territories, and the CSHA is under threat.

## Letter from Bob Thomas

*Astute readers of the April edition of newsletter may recall an article by the Pilbara Community Legal Service on the Rental Tenancy Act. As the article referred to some Homeswest procedures, Bob Thomas, (General Manager of Homewest) has written the following reply. The reply has been edited for length; the full text of Bob's letter is included with the online version of this newsletter ([www.shelterwa.org.au](http://www.shelterwa.org.au)).*

I noted with interest the article provided by Pilbara Community Legal Services printed in Shelter's April newsletter. While appreciating PCLS's right to its views on Homeswest's policies, practices and decision making I believe a number of the points made by PCLS are simply incorrect. I therefore would appreciate the opportunity to clarify these matters.

In regard to Homeswest's ability to retain tenants' bond accrual payments, this exemption under the RTA has, and continues to provide additional products and services to public housing tenants. I fail to see how tenants are adversely affected by this exemption in that as in the private sector, ultimately the bond is either refunded in full by the Department or is used to offset any outstanding debts at vacation. Unlike the private sector, tenants also have the benefit of being able to pay off the bond in affordable instalments. While Homeswest is not required to provide sixty days notice of a rent increase where a rental subsidy is provided, this is offset by the fact that the tenant receives the benefit of paying a reduced rent. Tenants are aware that their rent will only increase where their income increases which in itself provides tenants with some notice of rent increases.

I recognise that there are instances where direct debit or Centrelink deductions do occur and the tenant's rental account falls into arrears as a result. Where payments are not received due to a failure in the automated payment process, the Department is always willing to accept an affordable repayment arrangement.

While the Department does not have offices in Marble Bar, Newman and Roebourne, this does not limit the service provided to tenants. All three centres are well serviced by the Department. The Accommodation Manager visits Marble Bar and Newman on a regular basis and Roebourne is visited almost everyday. All tenancy issues are addressed in a timely manner and the Supported Housing Assistance Program is well run in Newman. The Department has previously utilised space at the Yandina Family Centre and the Accommodation Manager would be available in this location for a few hours a day once a week. This trial was largely unsuccessful with no clients visiting the office on many occasions. This is obviously a waste of resources and it is more appropriate for the Accommodation Manager to be available to visit tenants during these periods.

In terms of PCLS's suggestion that there is a "culture of Administration by drive by" I advise that this is baseless and incorrect. All properties in the Pilbara region are thoroughly inspected at least once per year (or more often if need be) in line with standard Departmental policy.

PCLS's comments about the assessment of rent and the application of, or backdating of, rent increases are also not correct.

Where a tenant's income increases they are required to notify the Department to ensure their rent is correctly assessed. If a tenant fails to notify the Department the resultant rent increase will be backdated to the commencement of employment. This is fair and reasonable and is in line with the requirements of the Commonwealth State Housing Agreement. Provided tenants maintain the arrangement to clear the arrears, they will not be evicted.

As stated by PCLS maintenance on Department properties is carried out by contractors. However, it is inaccurate and misleading to suggest that this has resulted in poor quality work and that there is a lack of checks on the quality of work and materials used and a lack of maintenance reporting mechanisms. The Department undertakes regular inspections of 10% of job orders under \$500, inspects all job orders over \$500, all insurance, tenant liability, improvements and upgrade works. Under the terms of Homeswest Zone Maintenance Contracts Contractors are required to use materials from the Department's approved materials list and to Australian standards to ensure good quality products are used.

In terms of maintenance identification and reporting mechanisms, the Department has a comprehensive maintenance identification process in place. The Department maintains its properties to a standard commensurate with the wider community. The Department will consider any request for maintenance and the majority of items are fixed immediately or within one to two weeks.

*Continued on page 8...*

# YOUTH HOUSING AND SOCIAL EXCLUSION IN WA

By Tim Davis

## Background

In order to contribute to an integrated response to the challenges facing marginalised young people, the Youth Affairs Council of WA (YACWA) and Shelter WA co-hosted a consultative forum on 11 April 2002 titled "Youth Housing and Social Exclusion in WA". This article summarises the final report, which will be presented to the relevant authorities, including the Minister for Housing, for further consideration.

## What is Homelessness?

Homelessness is experienced on a three stage continuum<sup>1</sup>:

*Primary homelessness* includes all people without conventional accommodation.

*Secondary homelessness*

includes people who move frequently from one form of temporary shelter to another

*Tertiary homelessness* refers to people who live in boarding houses on a medium to long-term basis.

*"To be homeless... is probably the most serious manifestation of social exclusion. If you are homeless it is almost impossible to realise your potential as an active member of society"*<sup>2</sup>

## What is Social Exclusion?

*"Social exclusion is a shorthand term for what can happen when people or areas suffer from a combination of linked problems such as unemployment, poor skills, low incomes, poor housing, high crime, bad health and family breakdown"*<sup>3</sup>.

## Exclusion Indices

The impact of the following seven youth exclusion indicators<sup>4</sup> were considered in the report:

### 1 Homelessness

Table 1 approximates the types of shelter used by homeless WA young people. Nationally an estimated 37 000 12 to 24 year

**Table 1 WA Homeless people aged 12-24 yrs by Living Condition**

	Number	Proportion (%)
<b>Boarding Houses</b>	688	16
<b>SAAP</b>	474	11
<b>Friends/relatives</b>	2282	53
<b>Imp. dwelling</b>	861	20
<b>Total</b>	<b>4305</b>	<b>100</b>

Source: Adapted from "Counting the Homeless" 1999

olds were homeless on a typical night in 1996, an estimated 4305 of whom were in WA<sup>5</sup>. This figure represents 1.3 per cent of all WA young people aged 12-24 yrs.

***To be homeless... is probably the most serious manifestation of social exclusion***

### 2 Unemployment

Recent data comparing Centrelink Newstart and Youth Allowance payments (\$145 p/w) and the Henderson Poverty Line (\$278.04) for young single people show that the Federal government expects this group to live on weekly payments \$132.99 below the poverty line<sup>6</sup>:

Between 1995 and 2000, despite the number of total jobs growing nationally by 10 per cent, almost all of these new jobs went to those aged 25 years and over, with only 1 per cent more 15 to 24 year olds in employment over this period<sup>7</sup>.

### 3 Low rates of pay

It is one thing to have a job, it is quite another to have a job that pays the bills. For instance, ABS data shows that over the decade between 1985 and 1995 the earnings of young employees fell compared to older workers<sup>8</sup>. Making ends meet for young workers appears to have not gotten easier in the meantime.

Of the 63,825 working WA young people aged 15-19, an estimated 38,295 (or 60%) are without parental support<sup>9</sup>. The majority of this group are trying to manage on incomes below the poverty line, and although they may not be strictly "socially excluded", would be finding normal social participation a real challenge

### 4 Not in education, training or work

The proportion of the labour force neither employed nor in some form of training is 8.4 percent, and represents 5 per cent of the teenage population<sup>7</sup>. Those who are neither studying, training or working are "pathless" and therefore most at risk of long-term exclusion with its accompanying problems.

Continued on page 7...

# Final Report: Homeswest's Debt Policy

In June 2001, the Rental Sector Standing Committee (RSSC) established a working group to review Homeswest's Debt Policy. The RSSC informs the Minister for Housing on issues affecting public and private renters through the Housing Advisory Committee. The review culminated in a report written by Shelter WA in April 2002.

The Debt Report considers the impact of all Homeswest policies related to debt management,

including the Tenant Liability, Debt Recovery and Debt Discount Scheme Policies. In addition to removing many inconsistencies, the report's 72 recommendations include:

- establishing a Statute Barred Debt Policy, stating that debts more than six years old or covered under a bankruptcy become "Statute Barred", and payment is not requested,

- abolishing rather than suspending the Bankruptcy Policy, removing all preambles from policy, and
- conducting a broad review of Homeswest policies with a view to minimise the impact on tenant debt.

The Report is available from Shelter WA's website, [www.shelterwa.org.au](http://www.shelterwa.org.au)

---

## Recent Publications

*Shelter WA papers and reports, July 2001 to June 2002:*

### June 2002

- *Shelter WA Information Sheet #17: Information and Advice for Tenants*
- *Shelter WA Occasional Paper 2002-1: The Future of the CSHA*
- *Final Report: Midland Housing Forums*
- *Report: Homelessness Survey, March 2002*
- *Youth Housing and Social Exclusion in WA*, including the Final Report on the Shelter WA / YACWA Youth Housing Forum, 11 April 2002 and the Report on the Shelter WA Youth Housing Survey, February 2002

### April 2002

- *Shelter WA Newsletter, April 2001: Review of the Residential Tenancies Act*
- *A Balanced Act: Shelter WA's Submission to the Statutory Review of the WA Residential Tenancies Act 1987*
- *Final Report: Homeswest Debt Policy Review*

- *Discussion Paper: Shelter WA / YACWA Youth Housing Forum, April 2002*
- *Report: Shelter WA / TAS RTA Forum, 5 April 2002*

### March 2002

- *Report: Housing Issues Identified by Participants at the Midland Region Community Consultation, 28 November 2001*

### December 2001

- *The State of Housing in the West Kimberley: Final Report on Shelter WA West Kimberley Housing Forums*
- *Report on Shelter WA / WACOSS / CHCWA Forum on Homelessness (12 December 2001)*
- *Shelter WA Information Sheet #16: Homeswest Policies: Rent to Income and Rental References*
- *Shelter WA Newsletter, December 2001: Community Housing*

### November 2001

- *Shelter WA Occasional Paper 2001-2: Increasing Affordable Rental Housing Stock in WA*

### October 2001

- *Final Report: Shelter WA Forums on CSHA Renegotiations*
- *Notes to Shelter WA Homelessness Forum (19 September 2001)*
- *Shelter WA Information Sheet #15: The Commonwealth State Housing Agreement*
- *Shelter WA Annual Report 2000/2001*

### July 2001

- *Government Housing Services Provision in WA: An Overview*

*Recent additions to the library from other sources:*

- Parity, April 2002: *Young People, Mental Health and Homelessness*, Council to Homeless Persons.
- Government of Western Australia, *2002-03 Budget: - Growing Our State - Budget Overview*
- Department of Family and Community Services. Monograph No.1 December 2001. *SAAP Monograph: Indigenous SAAP clients*

# YOUTH HOUSING AND SOCIAL EXCLUSION continued

## 5 Substance Abuse

Problems facing young homeless people with substance abuse issues include<sup>11</sup>:

- young homeless people seeking withdrawal cannot access home detox programs since few agencies will allow home detox despite the majority of withdrawal places being in home detox programs;

## 6 Suicide

The suicide rate for young males more than doubled from 1978 to 1996. The rate of suicide among Australian youngpeople is estimated to be the fifth highest in the world<sup>12</sup>.

The dislocations which accompany the current changes in the Australian economy have had an

## 7 With a criminal record

Young people are over-represented in their contact and involvement with the justice system. Nationally, in 1995 29 per cent of prisoners were under the age of 25. Indigenous young people make up a disproportionate number of those in prison. Almost all young prisoners were males<sup>13</sup>.

**Table 2: Key Issues Survey Findings**

Issue	Percentage see as a "major" Issue	
	Youth Perspective %	Agency Perspective %
Lack of Income	54	77
Programme Co-ordination	8	31
Substance abuse	46	54
Program funding/flexibility	23	46
Lack of housing	23	85
Mental health	0*	36
Indigenous needs	8	46
Government policies/procedures	31	69
Lack of Early intervention	23	62
Transitional housing options	Not asked <sup>@</sup>	80
Disability needs	0	46
Lack of educational/training opportunities	14	31
Age discrimination	Not asked	46

\* 62% of young people surveyed were affected by mental health issues to some extent

@ This question was covered in "Lack of housing"

- nowhere to stay while waiting for treatment hence no contact details nor an ability to make daily calls to secure a place on the waiting list;
- their drug use is public, hurried, unsanitary and dangerous;
- they frequently have many caseworkers but no single adult responsible for their emotional well-being and development;
- withdrawal is much more difficult without safe housing.

especially severe impact on Australian youth. Both youth unemployment and indeed, homelessness, are at unprecedented levels. Aggressive feelings thus engendered are compounded when young people are blamed for their own misfortune. Youth suicide, homelessness and unemployment form a complex web that, while hinging on hopelessness, belie simple causal explanations.

## Key Issues

To inform the youth homelessness forum Shelter WA designed and conducted a questionnaire survey to try to clarify consumer views on housing issues. Two small surveys were distributed; one for youth agencies (13 responses) and the other for young people themselves (14 responses). Table 2 summarises the results which are set out according to the proportion of each group reporting each issue as a "major" problem.

Continued page 9...

## Letter from Bob Thomas (Continued)

Maintenance items are identified as part of the annual inspection process, through ad hoc property visits or can be reported by tenants to the office or the after hours service.

In respect to the cases referred to by PCLS, I can advise that the Department has recently modified its policy relating to repairs to hot water systems. Under the revised policy, hot water problems are repaired within 24 hours if the problem is reported up to 3pm on a Saturday. After this time repairs are undertaken on the Monday. The Department is not aware of the incident regarding the faulty lock on the bathroom door and it would appear that the specifics of this case were not referred to the Department and it was therefore not given the opportunity to address the problem. However, if PCLS can provide me with specific details, I will investigate the matter further.

While noting PCLS' s comments on the need for greater focus on the improvement of Roeboume by the Shire of Roeboume and for other agencies to work with them to improve the town, I can confirm that the Department of Housing and Works is working on the Roeboume Enhancement Scheme.

I was disappointed to read PCLS's comments about domestic violence and security issues, as the Department has a comprehensive policy relating to domestic violence which outlines the Department's

response to these matters. The Department's response may be in the form of a priority transfer or additional security for tenants in occupation or may be the provision of housing on a priority basis for applicants. While the Department actively provides additional security where the tenant wishes to remain in the area, it is often more appropriate for the tenant to relocate away from the area.

In relation to window locks it is acknowledged that the some properties have the old style wooden window frames and locks as pictured in the newsletter. However, in recent years as part of the planned maintenance and security upgrade programs, the Department has been replacing these frames with aluminum frames with keyed locks. Each request will be assessed on its merits however, preference will be given where there are genuine security concerns such as an adjoining right of way or harassment. Nevertheless, I do accept that there will be tenants who feel they require additional security and as stated earlier, the Department is using funds generated by the bond accrual process to provide security to single parent families.

PCLS's allegation that the Department contravenes section 27 of the Residential Tenancies Act is simply not correct. Former tenants with a debt are required to commence payments against a

debt to be considered for further assistance. This does not constitute payment for a tenancy. Ultimately, there is only a certain amount of money available for public housing and if former tenants do not pay their outstanding debts this reduces the level of funds available. As has recently been highlighted through the State Homelessness Report additional funds are required to meet the housing needs of low income Western Australians so the Department cannot allow former tenants to be housed without any commitment to repay their outstanding debts. Indeed, the Department does offer the Debt Discount Scheme which provides former tenants with the opportunity to have 50% of their debt waived if they commit to a repayment arrangement and pay the initial 50% of the debt. This Scheme is widely used and has enabled many clients to re-enter housing.

Finally, I would like to make the point that the Department does work for the benefit of tenants and is committed to resolving tenants' concerns as soon as possible. I would therefore encourage any tenants with concerns to discuss their concerns with their Accommodation Manager, the Area Manager or to write to the Acting Regional Manager, Shayne Hills or myself with the details.

Yours sincerely  
BOB THOMAS  
GENERAL MANAGER, HOUSING  
AND FACILITIES MANAGEMENT  
May 24, 2002

---

## Goodbye Tim

After a trial 18 months, the position of Project Officer has been made redundant. Unfortunately it cannot be extended due to funding limitations.

The time has therefore come to say goodbye to Tim Davis. Shelter

WA will miss Tim's contribution to the organisation and consistently high quality of work.

During his time with Shelter WA Tim undertook a number of projects and wrote several reports, including *Government Housing*

*Services Provision in WA: An Overview and Youth Housing and Social Exclusion in WA*. Shelter WA believes that Tim's work will leave a lasting mark on the housing sector.

We wish Tim all the best with his career.

## YOUTH HOUSING AND SOCIAL EXCLUSION continued

### Summary

The point of the forum was to work towards positive changes for young people excluded from basic social pathways; housing being the most fundamental of these. However the stark reality is that the barriers they face in attempting to obtain housing are not "breakfast table" issues. That

is, too few W A voters are either interested in, or aware of, the plight of a significant minority of our young people.

Hence while youth housing and social exclusion remain on the margins of political/electoral agendas, the fortunes of this group are unlikely to improve. In fact, if public housing stocks

continue to fall as a proportion of all WA dwellings, and if youth access to private rentals also keeps contracting, the situation can only worsen. Ironically, even from a purely fiscal perspective, the long-term negative multiplier effects of failing to better include and house young people far outweigh any short-term funding considerations<sup>14</sup>.

### Endnotes

1. Estimate based on data from Chamberlain, C. 1999. Occasional paper. Counting the Homeless: Implications for Policy Development Australian Bureau Of Statistics
2. European Federation of National Organisations Working with the Homeless, 1998. Europe against exclusion: Housing For All. Published with the support of the European Commission.
3. Quoted in F. Farrington, 2001 Social Exclusion in South Australia: Analysing the South Australian Labor Party's Social Inclusion Initiative. Unpublished honours thesis
4. Rahman, M. et al 2001. Monitoring Poverty and Social Exclusion 2001. Joseph Rowntree Foundation.
5. op cit Chamberlain, C. 1999.
6. Poverty Line Update, Information sheet no.3, August 2001 Quoted in Brotherhood of St. Laurence *Facts, figures and suggestions for the future* Income support and poverty
7. The Prime Minister's Youth Pathways Action Plan Task force 2001, Appendix 6
8. ABS 1997 Australian Social Trends 4102.0
9. Estimate based on data adapted from Youth Facts WA: A Profile of Young People 1996 Census, WA Office of Youth Affairs
10. Lewis, P. and B. Mclean 1998. The Teenage Labour Market In Western Australia. *The Centre for Labour Market Research and Department of Economics, Murdoch University* CLMR Discussion Paper Series 98/6 November, 1998
11. Henkel, Y. 1998 *The Problem With...* Parity V 12, Issue 8
12. op cit The Prime Minister's Youth Pathways Action Plan Task force 2001
13. National Crime Prevention Authority 1998 Living Rough: Preventing Crime and Victimization Among Homeless Young People - Full report.
14. Dixon, D., 1993, 'Economic Benefits of Supporting Homeless Young People' in Sykes H. *Youth Homelessness. Courage and Hope*, Melbourne University Press.

Note: The full report can be downloaded from the Shelter WA website at [www.shelterwa.org.au](http://www.shelterwa.org.au).

## Notice to newsletter Readers

Shelter WA regrets to inform readers that due to funding constraints, future editions of **newsletter** will be mailed only to Shelter WA members. Electronic copies can be accessed from our website at [www.shelterwa.org.au](http://www.shelterwa.org.au).

If you are not a member and you wish to continue receiving hard copies of **newsletter** you need to become a member. Fees start from \$5 per year; a membership form is included on page 15 of **newsletter**.

## HAC Update *by Paul Pendergast*

Following the recent review of the Housing Advisory Committee (HAC), Tom Stephens, Minister for Housing and Works has agreed to take on the Chair. Two key issues raised by the HAC Membership during the review process, were the need for feedback about how recommendations from the committee had been utilised and for the Minister to take a more active role in requesting advice, having the Minister as Chair has resolved both of these.

### *What is the HAC?*

The HAC is an advisory body to the Minister for Housing and Works. Its role is to advise the Minister on state government housing policy, to participate in the development of Department of Housing and Works policy and program initiatives, to advise on research and the development of new policies and to assist in identifying housing needs in the community.

Most of the HAC's research and policy work is undertaken by its three standing committees, all of which are chaired by Shelter WA:

- Rental Sector Standing Committee
- Community Housing Standing Committee
- Finance and Home Ownership Standing Committee

### *Rental Sector Standing Committee (RSSC)*

The RSSC examines and responds to issues affecting consumers in the rental sector, including public, private and supported accommodation. The Standing Committee gives consideration to housing issues affecting consumers including affordability, appropriateness, accessibility and security of tenure. Some of the current work of the RSSC includes:

- Homeswest Application Form: redraft of Homeswest priority application forms on medical grounds
- Homeswest Pet Policy: revised in light of recent legislation regarding "restricted breeds" of dogs
- Homeswest Appeals Mechanism: RSSC has been asked to give further consideration to the review of the HAM and make recommendations to HAC
- Waiting List Working Group: The DHW Waiting List Working Group was established by the RSSC in response to community concerns in relation to the period between application for and allocation of public housing. The working group will examine statistics, policies and procedures from the Department of Housing and Works and elsewhere in order to identify key factors that lengthen waiting list times for specific groups of applicants. The Working Group hopes to make recommendations on ways of shortening waiting list times for each group by the end of the year.

### *Community Housing Standing Committee (CHSC)*

The role of the CHSC is to identify and develop strategic policy designed to support the growth and viability of the community housing system in Western Australia.

Some of the current work of the CHSC includes:

- Community Housing Strategic Plan: The Board of Commissioners (DHW) wants a vision for community housing for the next five years before proceeding with a strategic plan. CHSC members support

the need for a vision and have agreed to propose a community housing vision to feed into the Board's process. Board members will be invited to participate.

- Local Government Rates Concessions: South City HA are appealing against the City of Armadale's decision. The case is set down before the Land Valuation Tribunal for the 9<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> of September '02. CHWA has surveyed a sample of community housing providers about rates. This shows that rates exemptions have fallen from approx 70% to 40% over the last two years.
- CDHP Lease Arrangements: There is general support for a reduction in the number of lease arrangements. The sector is looking for two lease types and some changes to lease fees.

### *Finance and Home Ownership Standing Committee (FHOSC)*

The role of the FHOSC is to promote home ownership, to advise on policies as they relate to home ownership, to advise and recommend research and identify strategies for increasing affordable and sustainable home ownership.

Current work of the FHOSC includes:

- Barriers to Home Ownership: The FHOSC will be working on identifying barriers to home ownership and ways to improve affordability.

# One year on and demand from the Homeless Continues

By Paul Pendergast

In May 2001 the Department of Housing and Works established the *Homeless Helpline*. The Helpline had two main objectives. First to provide housing assistance to the homeless and second to record statistics on the extent of homelessness in WA. Since its launch, the Helpline has received an average of 13 calls per day from homeless people.

Over its first year of operation the *Helpline* received 3,338 calls from 2447 separate households (891 repeat calls). The primary homeless (people without conventional accommodation) account for 27% of calls and secondary homeless (people who move frequently from form of temporary shelter to another) 73% (see table 1 for further details).

## Assistance Provided by the Homeless Helpline

The Helpline utilises three main forms of assistance:

*Bond Assistance Loans:* provide financial assistance for households to access private rental;

*Public Housing:* priority access to Homeswest housing; and

*Referral:* assistance to access private or crisis accommodation.

The Helpline has been able to provide assistance to 44% (figure includes where outcome of assistance is known) of callers.

The assistance provided includes: 344 with access to Homeswest housing, 255 with Bond Assistance Loans and 479 with referrals to private or crisis accommodation (Table 2 provides further detail).

The Homeless Helpline has certainly assisted a significant number of homeless people and demonstrated that homelessness is a much bigger issue than many people believed prior to the Helplines establishment. However, the effectiveness of the Helpline would be significantly enhanced by increased access to affordable housing.

Primary Homeless	671	27%
Secondary Homeless	1776	73%
<b>Total</b>	<b>2447</b>	<b>100%</b>

Source: Homeless Helpline June 2002

Homeswest Housing	344	14%
Issued with Bond	255	10%
Referral private/crisis accom.	479	20%
Outcome Unknown	1369	56%
<b>Total</b>	<b>2447</b>	<b>100%</b>

Source: Homeless Helpline June 2002

Did you know?



members...

- receive quarterly hardcopies of **newsletter** and information sheets
  - may vote at Special and Annual General Meetings
  - have access to our reference library
  - receive 30% discount off all Shelter WA publications
  - receive regular news on housing policy and research via email.
- Support Shelter WA's work on affordable housing in WA and become a member. See form on back page.

# IT IS TIME ... to renew your membership

## ABOUT SHELTER WA

**Shelter WA** is a peak community managed housing organisation established in 1979, which seeks to represent the views of consumers and community groups on major housing issues. **Shelter WA's** aim is the realisation of a housing system that ensures:

- Every person has access to affordable, appropriate, safe and secure housing;
- Housing provision free from all forms of discrimination; and
- Housing that enhances people's health, dignity and life opportunities.

**Shelter WA** membership includes:

- Use of **Shelter WA's** reference library
- 30% off all **Shelter WA** publications
- 4 newsletters
- Regular housing information sheets
- Regular news on housing policy and research via email

## JOIN NOW

### Annual Membership Fees

- Individuals ..... **\$10.00**
- Concession / Students ..... **\$5.00**
- Organisations with budgets under \$100,000 ..... **\$15.00**
- Organisations with budgets between \$100,000 and \$200,000 ..... **\$35.00**
- Organisations with budgets over \$200,000 . **\$50.00**

**All membership fees include GST.**

### Shelter WA Staff

Karel Eringa  
Development Manager  
karel@shelterwa.org.au

Paul Pendergast  
Policy Manager  
paul@shelterwa.org.au

Glynis Menezes  
Administration and Finance Officer  
glynis@shelterwa.org.au

### newsletter production

*Publisher*  
Shelter WA

### *Editors*

Tim Davis and Karel Eringa

### *Contributors*

Paul Pendergast  
Karel Eringa  
Tim Davis  
Bob Thomas

*The views expressed in this newsletter do not necessarily reflect those of Shelter WA*



## Membership Application / Renewal

NAME: .....

ORGANISATION: .....

ADDRESS: .....

POSTCODE: .....

EMAIL: .....

PHONE: ..... FAX: .....

I enclose a cheque for \$ .00, made out to **Shelter WA**. See reverse for membership details. Fill-out, stamp and mail today!

**Attachment: Full text of letter from Bob Thomas.**

Mr Karel Eringa  
Shelter WA  
1st Floor  
33 Moore Street.  
EAST PERTH WA 6004

Dear Karel

I noted with interest the article provided by Pilbara Community Legal Services printed in Shelter's April newsletter.

While appreciating PCLS's right to its views on Homeswest's policies, practises and decision making I believe a number of the points made by PCLS are simply incorrect. I therefore would appreciate the opportunity to clarify these matters.

In regard to Homeswest's ability to retain tenants' bond accrual payments, this exemption under the RTA has and continues to provide additional products and services to public housing tenants. In recent years, the interest earned on tenants' bonds has been utilised to provide additional items such as security screens and barrier doors to seniors, families at risk and has now been extended to single parent families. Without the ability to use these funds, this additional security would need to be funded from other sources thereby reducing other services. I fail to see how tenants are adversely affected by this exemption in that ultimately the bond is either refunded in full by the Department or is used to offset any outstanding debts at vacation. This operates similarly to the private sector. Tenants also have the benefit of being able to pay off the bond in affordable installments. This option is not available to tenants renting in the private sector.

While Homeswest is not required to provide sixty days notice of a rent increase where a rental subsidy is provided, this is offset by the fact that the tenant receives the benefit of paying a reduced rent. Where full rent is charged and is to be increased, Homeswest does provide sixty days notice. As Homeswest rents are based on 25% of the tenants income, tenants are aware that their rent will only increase where their income increases this in itself provides tenants with some notice of rent increases.

It is acknowledged that where tenants pay their rent via Centrelink direct deduction or direct debit from their bank account no receipt is issued. However, tenants do have the ability to monitor their payments through their quarterly rent statements, bank statements and by monitoring the level of funds in their bank account after their Centre link benefit is credited.

I recognise that there are instances where direct debit or Centrelink deductions do occur and the tenant's rental account falls into arrears as a result. However, this is generally as a result of changes in the income source or the level of funds available in the account. Nevertheless, where a payments are not received due to a failure in the automated payment process, the Department is always willing to accept an affordable repayment arrangement. The Department's arrears follow up process is very thorough and any tenant who falls into arrears is notified very early on that their account is behind, thereby providing them with the opportunity to rectify the situation immediately.

While the Department does not have offices in Marble Bar, Newman and Roebourne, this does not limit the service provided to tenants. All three centres are well serviced by the Department. The Accommodation Manager visits Marble Bar and Newman on a regular basis and Roebourne is visited almost everyday. All tenancy issues are addressed in a timely manner and the Supported Housing Assistance Program is well run in Newman. The Department has previously utilised space at the Yandina Family Centre and the Accommodation Manager would be available in this location for a few hours a day once a week. This trial was largely unsuccessful with no clients visiting the office on many occasions. This is obviously a waste of resources and it is more appropriate for the Accommodation Manager to be available to visit tenants during these periods.

In terms of PCLS's suggestion that there is a "culture of Administration by drive by" I advise that this is baseless and incorrect. All properties in the Pilbara region are thoroughly inspected at least once per year (or more often if need be) in line with standard Departmental policy. Appropriate notice is provided to the tenant in line with the requirements of the Residential Tenancies Act in all instances. However, during the course of their duties of Accommodation Managers do call on tenants on an ad hoc basis to inspect maintenance repairs, discuss rental arrears or raise concerns about property standards. If such a visit is inconvenient the Accommodation Manager will arrange an alternative time which is more suitable for the tenant.

PCLS's comments about the assessment of rent and the application of, or backdating of, rent increases are also not correct. Where a tenant's income increases they are required to notify the Department to ensure their rent is correctly assessed. If a tenant fails to notify the Department the resultant rent increase will be backdated to the commencement of employment. This is fair and reasonable and is in line with the requirements of the Commonwealth State Housing Agreement. While the backdating of a rent increase may be compounded and be added to the tenant's account resulting in rental arrears, the Department will accept the a repayment arrangement and the decision is also appealable under the Homeswest Appeals Mechanism. Provided tenants maintain the arrangement to clear the arrears, they will not be evicted.

As stated by PCLS maintenance on Department properties is carried out by contractors. However, it is inaccurate and misleading to suggest that this has resulted in poor quality work and that there is a lack of checks on the quality of work and materials used and a lack of maintenance reporting mechanisms.

The Department undertakes regular inspections of 10% of job orders under \$500, inspects all job orders over \$500, all insurance, tenant liability, improvements and upgrade works. Under the terms of Homeswest Zone Maintenance Contracts Contractors are required to use materials from the Department's approved materials list and to Australian standards to ensure good quality products are used.

In terms of maintenance identification and reporting mechanisms, the Department has a comprehensive maintenance identification process in place. The Department maintains its properties to a standard commensurate with the wider community. At the time of allocation, all fixtures are fully functional, all vacated maintenance has been completed and the property has been thoroughly cleaned.

During the life of the tenancy, the Department will attend to all necessary maintenance with non-essential or upgrade maintenance being identified as part of the property refurbishment or upgrade maintenance programs. The Department will consider any request for maintenance and the majority of items are fixed immediately or within one to two weeks.

Maintenance items are identified as part of the annual inspection process, through ad hoc property visits or can be reported by tenants to the office or the after hours service. In addition the Department has planned and programmed maintenance programs which are designed to identify high cost long term maintenance items to protect the Department's asset. In general, planned maintenance covers internal items such as replacement of windows, internal, roof and wall cladding. Programmed maintenance relates to painting and repairs to the roof and external areas of the property. During 2001/2002 the Department allocated \$3.366 million in total for maintenance to properties in the Pilbara. While this figure includes all vacated and day to day maintenance, it also includes \$300,000 for planned maintenance and \$215,000 for programmed maintenance.

The Department's maintenance programs provide an appropriate asset management strategy for its properties and while also providing tenants with the opportunity to report maintenance 24 hours a day, seven days a week. Clearly this does not support the suggestion that there is a lack of maintenance reporting mechanisms.

In respect to the cases referred to by PCLS, I can advise that the Department has recently modified its policy relating to repairs to hot water systems. Under the revised policy, hot water problems are repaired within 24 hours if the problem is reported up to 3pm on a Saturday. After 3 pm on a Saturday repairs are undertaken on the Monday. The Department is not aware of the incident regarding the faulty lock on the bathroom door and it would appear that the specifics of this case were not referred to the Department and it was therefore not given the opportunity to address the problem. However, if PCLS can provide me with specific details, I will investigate the matter further.

While noting PCLS' s comments on the need for greater focus on the improvement of Roeboume by the Shire of Roeboume and for other agencies to work with them to improve the town, I can confirm that the Department of Housing and Works is working on the Roeboume Enhancement Scheme. This is a joint initiative between the Department of Housing and Works and the Pilbara Development Commission. The Shire of Roebourne is being consulted as part of this process. The main aims of this Scheme are to:

- Improve the physical amenities of Roebourne;
- Undertake precinct planning for areas including education, health, justice and youth; and
- Improve service delivery through the coordination of current services.

I was disappointed to read PCLS's comments about domestic violence and security issues, as the Department has a comprehensive policy relating to domestic violence and outlining the Department's response to these matters. The Department views domestic violence as a very serious issue that warrants an immediate response. This response may be in the form of a priority transfer or additional security for tenants in occupation or may be the provision of housing on a priority basis for applicants. While the Department actively provides additional security where the tenant wishes to remain in the area, it is often more appropriate for the tenant to relocate away from the area.

In relation to window locks it is acknowledged that the some properties have the old style wooden window frames and locks as pictured in the newsletter. However, in recent years as part of the planned maintenance and security upgrade programs, the Department has been replacing these frames with aluminum frames with keyed locks. The Department has a minimum standard of security provided to all properties including keyed deadlocks on all front entry doors and locks on all other doors. All seniors accommodation has barrier screens to all front and rear doors and all

adjustable accessible windows. Tenants in other accommodation types may apply for additional security such as barrier screens and doors or lock bolts to windows and doors. Each request will be assessed on its merits however, preference will be given where there are genuine security concerns such as an adjoining right of way or harassment.

Nevertheless, I do accept that there will be tenants who feel they require additional security and as stated earlier, the Department is using funds generated by the bond accrual process to provide security to single parent families.

Any tenant who feels their tenancy is not secure they are encouraged to contact their Accommodation Manager or the Area Manager.

PCLS's allegation that the Department contravenes section 27 of the Residential Tenancies Act is simply not correct. Former tenants with a debt are required to commence payments against a debt to be considered for further assistance. This does not constitute payment for a tenancy. Ultimately, there is only a certain amount of money available for public housing and if former tenants do not pay their outstanding debts this reduces the level of funds available. As has recently been highlighted through the State Homelessness Report additional funds are required to meet the housing needs of low income Western Australians so the Department cannot allow former tenants to be housed without any commitment to repay their outstanding debts. Indeed, the Department does offer the Debt Discount Scheme which provides former tenants with the opportunity to have 50% of their debt waived if they commit to a repayment arrangement and pay the initial 50% of the debt. This Scheme is widely used and has enabled many clients to re-enter housing.

Finally, I would like to make the point that the Department does work for the benefit of tenants and is committed to resolving tenants' concerns as soon as possible. I would therefore encourage any tenants with concerns to discuss their concerns with their Accommodation Manager, the Area Manager or to write to the Acting Regional Manager, Shayne Hills or myself with the details.

I would appreciate if this response could be published in your next newsletter.

Yours sincerely

BOB THOMAS

GENERAL MANAGER

HOUSING AND FACILITIES MANAGEMENT

May 24, 2002

cc. Pilbara Community Legal Service

I