

## Editorial

### *Is homelessness here to stay?*

Since being elected, the focus of the Labor government in housing has been squarely on homelessness. More specifically, it has launched two key initiatives, the Homelessness Helpline and the Homelessness Taskforce. The Helpline was intended to be one of a range of short term measures until the Taskforce was able to devise a longer term action plan. Unfortunately, both the Helpline and the Taskforce have some fundamental shortcomings.

Firstly, the Helpline has helped house some 213 people out of 800 calls (27%) in the first three months of its existence, 162 in public housing and 51 in private rental. The main reason why the Helpline has been unable to assist some callers is that it is not adequately resourced and focuses only on primary homelessness (people without any shelter). Most importantly, the Helpline does not directly manage any properties but relies on existing housing in the public, community and private sectors to place people.

One issue around the Helpline has been the confusion it has created around how it is integrated with Homeswest's priority system. Questions should also be raised about how the Helpline will impact on waiting times for Homeswest waiting lists. After all, without any additional stock, the Helpline could increase the wait times of existing applicants.

Secondly, as its name suggests, the Helpline relies on homeless people to make telephone contact, providing no opportunity for people to walk in off the street. However, recent research by Shelter WA suggests that only 38% of homeless people use the telephone to contact support agencies and experience at the Homeless Persons Information Centre in Sydney is similar. This implies that the Helpline could double its usage by providing a 'shopfront' service. It also implies that any statis-

tics based on its usage will severely underestimate the number of homeless people in WA. This is compounded by the fact that the Helpline is focussed on Perth and receives very few calls from outside the Metropolitan area.

A final problem with the Helpline is that anecdotal evidence suggests that the accommodation it provided was not always appropriate with respect to factors such as location, amenities, support and access to shops, education and public transport. Placing a homeless person in an unfurnished flat on the fringe of the metropolitan area without support or access to public transport is unlikely to lead to a successful tenancy, or provide the person with a long term solution to the root causes of their homelessness. However, due to a lack of resources, this is the approach of the Helpline.

Nevertheless, within its limited framework and with very limited resources, the Helpline has to be commended for finding at least short term accommodation for 213 people who would otherwise still be roofless. This is in line with the NGO meetings leading up to the establishment of the Taskforce, where measures such as the Helpline were seen to be acceptable as temporary fixes, while the Taskforce was intended to yield longer term solutions to the homelessness problem.

Unfortunately, due to the way in which it was established, the Taskforce may be unable to meet this expectation. The biggest problem the Taskforce must deal with is its composition: since the resignation of the Tenants Advice Service's employee, none of its members are employed by housing consumer organisations. Instead, low income housing consumers and their representatives are expected to 'feed into the process', without being resourced to do so, and without any opportunity to have direct input in the discussion. (*Contd p.2*)

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In the absence of a clear consumer voice, there is a risk that the Action Plan that is being prepared by the Taskforce will reflect the mindsets of its members by overemphasising initiatives like increasing the amount of crisis and supported accommodation. While Shelter WA and other consumer organisations have long highlighted the severe shortage of emergency accommodation, any increases in short term accommodation need to be backed up with increases in long term and exit housing as well as measures directed at the root causes of homelessness.

Experience suggests that increased supported and crisis accommodation will be filled quickly if no attempt is made to reduce the number of people using these services through preventative programs and an increase in low income housing stock. In other words, an approach focused only on increasing the amount of emergency and supported accommodation does not address the root causes of homelessness and fails to provide long term solutions.

These issues are compounded by the fact that the Taskforce's Action Plan is unlikely to receive appropriate levels of State Government funding to increase low income housing stock. This is indicated by the fact that whilst admitting WA has insufficient infrastructure funding for housing, the State Government has consistently blamed falling Commonwealth funding through the CSHA.

This attitude fails to recognise that, unlike in NSW where matching grants increased by 14%, in WA the State Gov-

ernment's CSHA matching funding has mirrored the fall in Commonwealth funding. Neither does it recognise that Commonwealth CSHA funding is scheduled to fall until the end of the current Agreement in 2003 and likely to fall beyond that date as the States' portion of GST income rises. Thirdly, it does not recognise that falling matching funding gives WA a severe credibility problem regarding the priority of housing in its policy when it negotiates the CSHA with the Commonwealth. Finally, none of this is helped by the fact that WA currently provides its matching funding by selling prime land in inner suburban areas rather than through direct allocations of funds from the State coffers.

In short, without adequate action to address the causes of homelessness and without increases in long term and exit housing, it is doubtful that the Taskforce will provide lasting solutions. If the State Government is serious about structural solutions to homelessness it should give low income housing consumers a significant voice on the Taskforce. If it wishes to make real and long term inroads into homelessness it should not pass blame to the Commonwealth but allocate real funds to increase stock for low income housing consumers through the public, private and community housing sector.

If the State Government does not address the root causes of homelessness but insists on stopgap measures, homelessness will be here to stay.

Karel Eringa

## Newsletter Survey Feedback

Many thanks to all **newsletter** readers who responded to our faxback evaluation. Within each section of the following summary, the responses are broadly listed from the most to the least frequent:

- 1 Parts of **newsletter** you liked:
  - o All;
  - o Timely updates on Homeswest policy changes and the Housing Advisory Committee (HAC);
  - o Well set out and easy to read print; and
  - o Relevant, in-depth policy discussion.
- 2 What you didn't like:
  - o Easily read graphs are preferred to tables;
  - o Need more articles from a service delivery, rather than a macro, perspective;
- 3 What you'd like to see in **newsletter**:
  - o Updates on policy changes and key decisions;
  - o State Homelessness Taskforce updates;
  - o Service provider profiles eg rural & remote, women's refuges, youth, Indigenous;
- 4 Homeownership issues eg options, land prices; and
- 5 More regional news – waiting lists, policy changes affecting regions.
- 4 If we produced more publications, you'd like to see:
  - o More information sheets to be able to hand out to clients;
  - o More newsletters and information sheets and available electronically;
  - o Email advice of important policy changes
  - o Either newsletters or information sheets, as long as the information is current and simple;
  - o More information in the newsletter rather than separate information sheets
- 5 How you rated **newsletter** (where "OK" equates to 50% satisfaction and "Excellent", 100%):
  - o Relevance of content 90%
  - o Quality of articles 90%
  - o Layout 65%
- 6 Other comments:
  - o A useful resource
  - o Colour coding would be helpful

# *An Overview of Government Housing Services Provision in Western Australia*

This article is a summary of a report under the same title by Tim Davis

## **Background**

The housing system in Western Australia comprises a complex mix of government and non-government housing and funding providers who service an equally diverse group of housing consumers. Given the large number of State, Commonwealth and Local government bodies providing information and/or assistance for housing, Shelter WA prepared an overview paper with a view to:

- o Improving cross government co-ordination by mapping the variety of government provided housing related services in WA; and
- o Identifying gaps and overlaps in the provision of such services.

## **Profile of Housing in Western Australia<sup>1</sup>**

Western Australia's housing profile reflects national patterns of housing choice. As in other Australian states, the main tenure types are home ownership (68% of households) private rental (including private, community and cooperative housing - 27%) and public rental (5%).

With public housing representing 5% of all dwellings, Western Australia ranks below the national average of 6%. In contrast South Australia, a state with a population comparable to Western Australia, has nearly 10% public housing stock (Shelter SA & SACOSS, 1999).

Tenure types vary across the State and the metropolitan area. Generally the highest proportions of dwellings being purchased were located in the outer metropolitan areas ranging from Wanneroo – North West (57%) to Kwinana (46%). Private rentals are more concentrated in inner locations; parts of Central Perth have up to 75% of dwellings being rented. (ABS, 1997a).

Within these broad groupings however, there are important differences in the tenure type of different family types. According to the 1996 Census, home ownership is more predominant among couple family households (80%) compared to one parent family

households (51%) and lone person households (55%). The latter household types are far more likely to be in the rental sector – one parent family (46%) and lone person (36%) households - compared to all households (27%) and couple family households (17%). The over-representation of one parent family and lone person households in the rental sector when compared to all households has a further dimension as these households are far more likely to be in the low income bracket.

There are significant numbers of low income households in Western Australia who are experiencing housing burden (ie paying over 25 percent of income for housing). According to 1998 research by the Australian Housing and Urban Research Institute (AHURI), the lowest 40% of income groupings either buying or renting housing are experiencing housing stress in Western Australia (AHURI, 1998). Low income households are defined as those with an income of \$25,000 and less. This compares to housing burden across all households of 13% for home purchasers and 20% for renters.

Low income households may be housed in 'affordable' housing yet experience 'locational disadvantage' in terms of access to transport, employment and services. The trend in Western Australia has mirrored that of other Australian cities with an increasing proportion of low income households located on the urban fringe with limited access to services and facilities.

## **Government Provided Housing Services<sup>2</sup>**

Levels of government in Western Australia have varying roles and responsibilities in the provision of housing and housing related assistance: The Commonwealth Government provides Commonwealth Rent Assistance (CRA) and shares responsibility with the State government for housing assistance provided under the CSHA. The

Commonwealth also influences the housing market through other direct and indirect means, including taxation;

The State government delivers and manages housing assistance provided under the CSHA, such as public housing, community housing, Indigenous rental housing, private rental assistance and home purchase assistance. It also provides home lending programs and joint ventures with the private sector and is responsible for land taxes, stamp duties and residential tenancy legislation; and local governments implement planning regulations and sometimes directly provide social housing and community support services.

### Commonwealth–State Housing Agreement (CSHA)

The CSHA is an agreement made under the *Housing Assistance Act 1996* between the Commonwealth, State and Territory governments to provide strategic direction and funding certainty for the provision of housing assistance. The aim of this agreement is to provide appropriate, affordable and secure housing assistance for those who most need it, for the duration of their need. A new four-year agreement came into effect on 1 July 1999 and includes, for the first time, bilateral agreements between the Commonwealth and each State and Territory government, as well as an overarching multilateral agreement. Bilateral agreements are intended to provide greater flexibility for States and Territories to respond to their particular housing needs.

### Funding arrangements

Approximately two-thirds of the funding under this agreement is provided by the Commonwealth and takes the form of general assistance funding (public housing, home purchase assistance and private rental assistance) and specified funding for identified programs — the Aboriginal Rental Housing Program, Crisis Accommodation Program and Community Housing Program. The majority of CSHA funding is distributed to State and Territory governments on a modified per capita basis, with the State and Territory governments contributing additional funding from their own resources to partly 'match' Commonwealth funding allocations.

Broad areas currently assisted by government hous-

ing services include:

*Social housing*, which has a fundamental role in housing people and building sustainable communities;

*Private rental market*, a tenure that is increasingly housing low income households in Western Australia;

*Home ownership*, the most significant tenure type in Western Australia and nationally, has been supported directly and indirectly by government policy in Australia;

*Support services* assisting people to access and keep appropriate, affordable and secure accommodation.

*Special needs* are met by a variety of housing programs provided to maximise access to housing for people with disabilities.

*Indigenous services* that address the specific housing needs of Indigenous Australians.

*Advice and advocacy* are key to accessing and keeping affordable and appropriate housing; and

*Concessions and exemptions* may be helpful to eligible housing consumers.

### Service Provision Overview

The study identified a number of incidences of service overlaps and gaps summarised below:

#### Incidences of service duplication:

Commonwealth rent assistance is paid by three agencies; Veteran's Affairs, Centrelink and Education, Training and Youth Affairs. Although these agencies focus on specific client groups, there still may be a case for integrating the payment of rent assistance into a single payment from one authority.

Home purchase assistance is available from six different sources. The various forms of home ownership assistance do differ in purpose and client group focus, yet some overlaps are apparent. For example the Home Buyers Assistance Scheme run by Consumer and Employment Protection, apart from having unrealistically low property value eligibility thresholds, is redundant while the Commonwealth's First Home Owner's Grant is in place. Similarly, the delivery of Veterans' Affairs Defence Service Homes loans may be more effective if integrated with DH&W home ownership programs.

## Government Housing Provision WA Matrix

	Housing & Works	Local Government	Ed., Train & Youth Affairs	Community Development	ATSIC	Veteran's Affairs	Centrelink	Cons. & Employ. Protect	Treasury & Finance	Family & Comm. Services	Health & Aged Care	Imm. & Multicult. Affairs	Tax Office	Disability Serv. Comsn	WA Health	Western Power	Total # Agencies
Support Services	✓	✓		✓		✓	✓			✓	✓	✓					8
Social Housing	✓	✓			✓	✓				✓	✓						6
Home Purchase	✓	✓				✓		✓									6
Youth Services	✓	✓	✓	✓			✓										6
Aged Services	✓	✓				✓	✓			✓							5
Rental Assistance	✓		✓			✓	✓										4
Advice	✓		✓	✓				✓									4
Rural/Remote	✓		✓		✓												4
Special Needs	✓	✓												✓	✓		4
Concessions		✓						✓				✓			✓		4
Crisis Accom.	✓			✓												✓	2
Indigenous Services	✓				✓												2
<b>Tot. Fns.</b>	13	7	5	4	3	3	3	2	2	2	2	1	1	1	1	1	

Home based care for seniors is provided by both Veterans' Affairs and Health and Aged Care. While there are some differences between the client needs of the respective programmes, they may not warrant duplicating providers.

#### Incidences of gaps in service provision:

Homeswest has no services that target the re-settlement of migrants. While re-settlement is well placed within Immigration and Multi-Cultural Affairs, close links with Homeswest are needed to ensure newly arrived people have ready access to public and community housing.

Lack of accommodation options and support for people in transition from short/medium term supported accommodation to mainstream public or private rental. Until more opportunities are provided to exit supported accommodation successfully, unmet demand for this form of social housing will continue to rise.

#### Notes:

1. This section and supporting references are summarised from a section by the same title in *Housing for a Sustainable Community: The State of Housing in Western Australia*, Shelter WA, 2000.
2. Part of this section was adapted from the *Report on Government Services 2001*, by the Steering Committee for the Review of Commonwealth/State Service Provision, January 2001.

#### Sources:

Information regarding specific service providers and agencies was collated from each organisation's website.

# *A Profile of Homelessness in WA*

by Paul Pendergast

Homelessness is an issue of growing concern within the Western Australian community. The ABS estimates 12,000 Western Australians were homeless on Census night 1996. More recently the Department of Housing and Works established a telephone information service, the *Homelessness Helpline* received requests for assistance from 408 households in its first 2 months of operation.

In the light of growing concern about homelessness Shelter WA decided to undertake a survey which aimed to: further develop Shelter WA's: knowledge of homelessness; inform policy development work on homelessness; and provide a resource to agencies concerned about homelessness.

Rather than trying to place a definitive figure on the number of homeless, the report provides a ***Profile of Households Experiencing Homelessness in Western Australia***.

Participating agencies were asked to complete 1 survey form for each homeless household requesting accommodation assistance on **Tuesday 19 June 2001**.

To encourage clarity and comparability participants were asked to apply the Australian Bureau of Statistics' definition of homelessness. This definition describes 3 levels of homelessness and includes:

- \* **Primary homelessness:** people without conventional accommodation;
- \* **Secondary homelessness:** people who move frequently from one form of temporary shelter to another; and,
- \* **Tertiary homelessness:** People who live in boarding houses on a medium to long-term basis

74 surveys were returned including 6 by agencies who participated but received no request for assistance. 68 surveys were completed, providing insights to homeless households who requested accommodation assistance 19 June 2001.

This research demonstrates that children and young people account for 67% of homeless people. Aboriginal people while representing 2% of

the general population, account for 40% of households experiencing homelessness.

The lack of access to affordable housing and growing levels of poverty are major contributors to the level of homelessness in our community.

## **Key Findings**

One out of three responses were received from services other than those funded under the SAAP, including financial counselling services and community legal centres. This shows the importance of including a broad range of agencies when undertaking research into homelessness, particularly in rural areas.

As many homeless households made contact with participating agencies in person as by phone. For services such as the Homelessness Helpline this shows access could be significantly increased by offering a shop front service.

33% of homeless people are children under the age of 14 years. The right of children to safe, secure and appropriate housing must be given top priority in any strategy to address the needs of homeless households.

41% of the homeless are Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders, this figure is 20 times their representation in the general community. Increased provision of housing for Aboriginal people is urgently required.

60% of homeless households require support services as well as housing. Showing the importance of assessing the household's need for support services to be provided.

45% of homeless households required assistance within 24 hrs and 46% within 14 days. Any assessment of the system of provision to homeless households must include an assessment of the balance between emergency and medium/long-term housing options to ensure bottlenecks are avoided.

61% of homeless households in the Perth Metro were singles and 25% single parents with children. Singles accounted for 40% of homeless households

and single parents with children 50% in rural areas. Responses to homelessness in Western Australia must consider the different needs of the metro and rural areas.

Median number making up homeless households ranged between 1 to 4 people. Housing responses directed toward homeless households must take into account the needs of singles and families.

59% of homeless households are experiencing secondary homelessness which involves households moving frequently from one form of temporary shelter to another. Responses to secondary homelessness must be treated with equal priority to those of the primary homeless.

73% of homeless households received incomes that placed them in the bottom quintile of incomes and all fell within the bottom 30% of incomes. Responses to homelessness must also include strategies directed toward reducing poverty.

Homeless households require between 40% and 70% of their gross weekly income to pay private rents, this is well in excess of the NHS 25% housing stress benchmark. For these households public rental housing is required to ensure the provision of affordable housing.

**A Profile of Households Experiencing Homeless in Western Australia** is available for download at: [www.shelterwa.org.au](http://www.shelterwa.org.au)

## Department of Housing and Works News

### POLICY CHANGES

#### Private Real Estate References

In acknowledging some of the difficulties experienced by customers attempting to obtain private rental accommodation, the Department of Housing and Works in conjunction with the Real Estate Institute of Western Australia has introduced a tenant/applicant reference form. This form is given to the customer who in turn may then provide the reference to a private landlord or Real Estate agent to assist in securing private rental accommodation. The document is provided for reference purposes only and not for the purpose of identification.

Any tenant/applicant who wishes to obtain a reference form should contact their nearest Department of Housing and Work's office (Homeswest Office).

#### Cash Assets & Deeming Rates

As from August 1<sup>st</sup>, 2001 the following Cash Asset rates for eligibility purposes and the Deeming rates for rent to income assessment will

apply:

#### Eligibility policy:

Cash asset or other non-property asset.  
 Single \$33,400  
 Couple \$55,800

#### Rent to Income

Asset Type	Deeming Rate
Cash or any non-property assets under \$33,400 (single) or \$55,800 (couple)	3.0%
Cash or any non-property assets over \$33,400 (single) or \$55,800 (couple)	4.5%
House and land or vacant land	4.5%

#### Rent to Income Percentage Rate

	0%	3%	4.5%
Single	\$1-8,000	\$8,000-33,400	\$33,400-100,000
Couple	\$1-15,000	\$15,000-55,800	\$55,800-\$1M

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## ***Housing Policy and Research Updates in your Email!***

Some readers will be aware that Shelter WA has recently launched an email list with news on housing policy and research. Subscription to the list is free and members receive fortnightly notifications of changes in policy affecting low income housing consumers as well as excerpts of new articles and reports. The complete versions of these reports can then be downloaded from Shelter's website.

So far, two editions have gone out and response has been very positive. To subscribe to the list, visit [www.shelterwa.org.au](http://www.shelterwa.org.au) and click on "mailing list".

## ***Call for Committee Members***

After three recent resignations, the Shelter WA Management Committee is more than a little light on for members. The forthcoming Annual General meeting is your opportunity for nomination and election to our Management Committee and so have a direct role in supporting and guiding the work of Shelter WA. For more information about Management Committee membership please call Karel at Shelter WA on 9325 6660.

## ***Information & Resources***

Shelter WA has recently added the following publications to our library:

- Badcock, B., A. Beer (2000) *Home Truths: Property Ownership and Wealth in Australia*. Melbourne University Press
- Baum, S. et al (1999) *Community Opportunity and Vulnerability in Australia's Cities and Towns*. AHURI
- Berry, M. et al (1999) *Falling Out of Home Ownership: Mortgage Arrears and Defaults in Australia*. AHURI
- Commonwealth Advisory Committee on Homelessness (2001) *Working Towards a National Homelessness Strategy*. Commonwealth of Australia
- Department of Family and Community Services (2001) *Housing Assistance Act 1996 Annual Report 1998-1999*. Commonwealth of Australia

## ***Housing Needs of People Affected by Mental Health Problems***

In May this year Shelter WA and the Western Australian Association for Mental Health (WAAMH) jointly sponsored a forum on the, ***Housing Needs of People Affected by Mental Health Problems***. The Forum was attended by thirty one people and included a broad range of consumers, support providers, housing, advocacy and policy agencies. This article provides a brief outline of the outcomes from the Forum process.

Shelter WA regularly holds community forums on housing issues as part of its funding arrangement with the Department of Housing and Works (DHW). These forums provide Shelter WA with:

- a process to facilitate cross-sector discussion; and
- access to direct consumer and community input to inform its housing policy work.

Shelter WA and WAAMH see the housing requirements of people affected by mental health problems as a priority issue. WAAMH has estimated a minimum of 3 500 people living with mental illness in Western Australia are homeless or at risk of homelessness.

To facilitate the Forum process a discussion paper was prepared by Christina Kadmos on behalf of Shelter WA. The Discussion Paper provided a review of research and reports from both the housing and mental health sectors and interviews with WAAMH, people from the Mental Health Consumer Representation Project and workers in the field.

The Forum agenda incorporated presentations by speakers; small groups and a plenary session to feedback the workshop outcomes to all participants.

The Forum speakers included:

- Sheryl Carmody: Support Issues Across Tenures
- Jacque Carter: Issues from a consumer perspective
- Janey Glauser: Issues from a non-government housing provider perspective
- Lance Risbey: Issues from a clinical support perspective

### **Key Findings Contained in the Final Report**

**Reform Process:** The direction of service provision to people with mental health problems has been toward deinstitutionalisation, with an emphasis on independence and interdependence. Interventions should be the least restrictive possible and promote the maintenance and development of independence. Support services are ideally delivered in the place of residence.

**The Reform Process & Housing:** Housing is consistently identified as a priority area where few gains have occurred, shortages are increasing and the situation is critical. The availability of affordable and secure housing is central to the success of de-institutionalisation.

Addressing the housing needs of people with mental illness must also include an understanding of the essential role support services play.

Interviews and workshops with stakeholders undertaken as part of this report largely supported the direction of reform but all agreed that the rhetoric of whole-of-government approaches, deinstitutionalisation and social health frameworks still has a long way to go before people living with a mental illness will have sufficient access to suitable, affordable housing options sufficiently flexible to respond to their diverse needs.

**Extent of Mental Illness:** The 1997 National Survey of Mental Health and Wellbeing of Adults found that 18% of those surveyed experienced some form of mental health disorder in the twelve months prior to the survey. This is consistent with other estimates that 1 in 5 Australians will experience a significant disruption to mental health and wellbeing sometime in their lives, with 3-5% of the population experiencing a serious, ongoing illness requiring treatment.

The report identifies a number of **key target groups**. Some these include:

**Young People:** Research conducted by the National Youth Coalition for Housing reinforces the notion that factors that place young people at risk of homelessness also place them at risk of mental illness

**Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander People:**

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander People are over-represented in mental health inpatient units. Whilst 2 % of the population, Aboriginal People can comprise over 15% of inpatient admissions and are five times more likely to be involuntarily hospitalised.

Direct and indirect discrimination and inadequate understanding the needs of Aboriginal people add to existing barriers to housing security.

**Homeless People:** It must be acknowledged that not all homeless people have a mental illness and the majority of people with a mental illness are not homeless. However, homeless people are more likely to experience mental health problems than the general population, estimates range from 25% to 75% of homeless people being affected.

People with mental illness are at greater risk of homelessness due to requirements of personal care, social isolation, family breakdown, stigma, discrimination and a breakdown in housing tenure due to hospital admissions.

**Women:** The HREOC Inquiry (1993) proposed that sociodemographic factors such as poverty, single parenthood, social role of carer and discrimination may place women at a greater risk of mental health problems.

Women with mental health problems as carers of children must be acknowledged in the provision of housing and support services.

**Carers and Family:** It is important to remember that family and/or carers are supporting many people living with mental illness and that carers require assistance, training and respite.

The place of carer and family must be incorporated more into the planning and design of supported housing options

**Housing Needs:** For someone with a mental illness or disorder, appropriate and secure housing is critical for a return to health. However, for many, tenure of housing is jeopardised through a lack of options, flexibility and support.

In order to achieve and maintain housing tenure, people with mental health problems:

- must feel secure and safe in their physical and social environment;
- require accessibility and proximity to social, cul-

tural and family networks, carers, shops, support services, medical and alternative treatments and programmes, recreation options, transport, amenities and community services that assist people with mental health problems to maintain tenure;

- must be properly heard and responded to if housing is to be maintained;
- require secure tenure that is sufficiently flexible to allow people to move between housing and support options and/or location without loss of continuity of care or tenancy; and
- reasonable choice without disadvantage has special significance for people who already experience alienation, discrimination and isolation and for whom their home is also their place of rehabilitation and healing.

The Final Report identifies a range of **existing housing options** and related issues:

**Boarders and Lodgers:** People in private boarding and lodging arrangements have little legal protection and access to services in the home is problematic. People with mental illness living in these arrangements can be vulnerable and open to exploitation.

**Cluster Homes:** Cluster housing in small to medium complexes is seen as a viable option for providing independent living whilst reducing social isolation and maintaining stability and well being. Few cluster homes are presently operating, but feedback from consumers is positive.

**Crisis Accommodation:** A forum held by the WA SAAP Protocols Project on the issue of mental health consumers highlighted the need for improved linkages between SAAP and mental health services. Improved information exchange, increased training and increased access to after hours support has been recommended. The inflexibility of mental health service boundaries was also found to be problematic.

**ILP/CDHP:** The Independent Living Program, whereby the DHW housing is headleased to community organisations and arrangements are put in place for support provision, is an initiative that has broad approval from participants in the Forum process. Long waiting lists present a barrier to accessing the Program.

**Psychiatric hostels:** Criticism of this model

raised by consumer, advocacy and carer groups includes inadequate support and quasi-institutionalised care that does little to encourage independent living.

**Private Rental:** People with mental health problems are vulnerable to discrimination and housing based poverty in accessing the private rental market. Increasing rents have resulted in a shortage of affordable private rental in many Perth suburbs.

People living successfully in private rental require varying levels of support and assistance to maintain tenancy, especially during times of high need or hospitalisation.

**Public Housing** The DHW plays a significant role in the provision of housing to people with mental health problems through its general housing, disability housing and the Community Disability Housing Program. Of the 35 000 DHW mainstream tenancies, 17% are in receipt of a Disability Support Pension and 26% the Carers Pension (it is not clear how many of these are affected by mental illness).

Waiting lists are a significant problem for people accessing public housing and this is likely to continue. Whilst expansion in housing stock has occurred in some programme areas, overall DHW presence as a proportion of the States total housing stock has been in decline from 6% in 1991 to 4.7% in 2000.

**Respite:** Respite services are required for both people

living at home with family and those living independently. Respite services, both in home and facility based, are particularly important for CALD communities and young people whom are more likely to be cared for in the home. More than 50% of young people with mental illness live with family.

**Outcomes From the Forum**

At the *Housing Needs of People Affected by Mental Health Problems Forum* workshops were formed to discuss each of the four key issues identified in the discussion paper and to develop recommendations for addressing these. The four key issues were:

- the need for increased **flexible, affordable and secure housing** opportunities;
- improved **availability, coordination and linkages in regard to support services** that assist people to maintain housing;
- improved **responsiveness to consumer and carer requirements**; and
- the need for a **whole of government, cross-sectorial, government/non-government approach to responding to the needs** of people with mental health problems.

An action plan has been established which incorporates the outcomes from the forum has been developed and is contained in the Final Report. A full version of the is available at: [www.shelterwa.org.au/](http://www.shelterwa.org.au/)

## Agency Profile

To kick off our new *Agency Profile* section, we threw some curly questions at Sarah Ward from the tenants' Advice service (TAS) for an overview of what they do and how they do it:

**SWA:** What is TAS's core business?

**Sarah:** TAS resources and provides back-up for a state-wide tenancy advice & advocacy network and Runs a tenant's advice phone-line. Direct tenant advocacy is mainly provided through the network of Local Service Units (LSU's) except in test cases, for which TAS has main responsibility

**SWA:** What kind of networks is TAS part of?

**Sarah:** Apart from its resourcing role with the LSU's, TAS is linked to the National Association of Tenancy Organisations (NATO). State NATO reps work together on joint responses to national tenancy issues and trends.

**SWA:** What's recently impacted on TAS's work?

**Sarah:** We have recently been granted extra Rental Accommodation Fund resourcing to be able to extend the advice line operating hours from sixteen to thirty hours per week. TAS has also been funded to employ a part-

time Publications Officer for 10 months (starting early September) to produce four publications on topics including Homeswest and shared housing.

**SWA:** What would you say are the major challenges facing TAS in the coming year?

**Sarah:** Although we are now being funded annually instead of month to month as previously, there runs a tenants advice phone-line. Direct tenant advocacy is mainly provide through the network of Local Service Units (LSU's) except in test cases, for which TAS has main responsibility.

**SWA:** From where, and how often, does TAS receive its funding?

**Sarah:** From the Commonwealth Attorney General's Department but mainly from interest from tenants' bonds held in the Rental Accommodation Fund administered by the WA Department of Consumer and Employment Protection. We are paid on a quarterly basis. is no preferred tender or fixed contract for the resourcing role TAS currently provides. So, as usual, TAS's future is far from certain.

TAS Advice line times are:

	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday
Metro Line 08 9221 0088	Closed	2pm-5pm	9am-12:30pm 1pm-7pm	7:30am-11am	7:30am-11am 3pm-7pm
Country Line 1800 621 888	Closed	9am-12:30pm	Closed	10:30am- 12:30pm	1pm-3pm

## *Perth Metro CSHA Forum*

On 15 August 2001 Shelter WA held a Perth Metro Housing Forum centred around the negotiations of the 2003 Commonwealth State Housing Agreement (CSHA), Australia's primary social housing funding agreement.

Following the opening of the forum by Bronwyn Kitching, Shelter WA Chairperson, Tom Stephens, Minister for Housing spoke on the Gallop government's commitment to keep affordable and social housing on the political agenda. The Minister stated that the government does not view social housing as a tenure of last resort, but rather as a valid alternative to the private sector, and sees one of its tasks as ensuring that sufficient stock is available to meet the increasing needs of low income housing consumers.

While the Minister acknowledged that the Homeless Helpline may be seen to be "naïve", he affirmed its value as one tool in streamlining access to public housing. He concluded by announcing the development of a State Housing Strategy, headed by Brian Howe, which will produce a long-term strategic plan for the housing sector.

The forum workshops were structured around four key issues:

- o Decline In Social Housing: Falling capital spending and rising Commonwealth Rent Assistance (CRA) spending, falling proportion of public housing stock, increasing reli-

ance on private rental housing, contraction of low-cost rental stock, increasing numbers of people with more complex housing needs, low income private renters locationally disadvantaged.

- Service integration: Holistic approach to housing which considers both shelter and non-shelter outcomes i.e. 'joined up solutions'. Need policies that consider employment incentives, good health and wellbeing outcomes, needs of people with disabilities, family stability, and education opportunities.
- o Housing Affordability: Particular groups - low income earners, those in insecure employment, and first home buyers. Questions around the appropriateness of current housing stress measures for very low income people.
- o Regional Issues: Need for increased access to affordable housing stock, access to affordable land, native title, sewer and infrastructure, land valuation, support programs for people experiencing homelessness and those whose tenancies with Homeswest are at risk.

A final report on the forum is currently being prepared and will be available on our website [www.shelterwa.org.au](http://www.shelterwa.org.au) and from the Shelter WA office.



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## *Role of 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 aims to ensure that every person has access to affordable, appropriate, secure and safe housing that is free from discrimination.

It does 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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*The views expressed in this newsletter do not necessarily reflect those of the Editor, Publisher or Shelter WA policy.*

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