



Shelter WA Update

March 2008

Support Restoration of Funding for National Shelter

National Shelter is the Australian peak non-government organisation representing the interests of low-income housing consumers. National Shelter is the collective federation of State and Territory Shelters and has been in operation since 1976. National Shelter received funding from the Commonwealth government until 30th June 1997 when it became the first peak body to have its advocacy, policy and lobbying role silenced and since that time has operated without staff or dedicated resources.

National Shelter continues on a voluntary basis, with support from State and Territory Shelters but its ability to be able to contribute an effective national perspective to the housing issues and policy considerations confronting the nation has been compromised. A proposal to restore Commonwealth funding to National Shelter was put forward to the Commonwealth in February 2008 in a submission on the Federal Budget 2008 – 2009.

Shelter WA supports the submission for re-funding National Shelter as the national peak body for housing consumers on low incomes. Lack of funding for National Shelter has led to a silence on the very issues that require most urgent attention. National Shelter has a high member and contribution input, comprising of representatives of Shelter bodies in all States and Territories, and also includes representation from such national bodies as the Community Housing Federation of Australia, the Australian Federation of Homelessness Organisations, National Youth Coalition for Housing and the National Association of Tenant Organisations. National Shelter collaborates with other national peak bodies such as the Australian Council of Social Service. Funding for start-up costs, recruitment and establishment expenses have been requested to restore National Shelter's ability to research and undertake advocacy for low income housing consumers on a national level. With housing affordability high on the Federal agenda, National Shelter would make an important and viable input into strategies at a national level.



National Shelter (left to right): Jeffrey Dalton (ACT), Deb Pippen (Tenants Union ACT), Toni Vine-Bromley (NT), Pattie Chugg (Tas.), Mary Perkins (NSW), Bronwyn Kitching (WA), Gary Wilson (SA), Eddie Burke (CHFA ACT), Adrian Pisarski Chair (Qld), Julie Bliss (Chair NT Shelter), Simon Smith (Homelessness Australia)

National Affordable Housing Summit

A Call to Action – Improving Housing Affordability

The paper 'Improving Housing Affordability – A Call to Action' was developed by the National Affordable Housing Summit Group in June 2007. At that time, the then Federal Opposition committed to developing a National Affordable Housing Agreement and the Affordable Housing Summit Group prepared background papers. Following the election victory, five lead agencies - the Housing Industry Association Ltd, Australian Council of Social Services, Australian Council of Trade Unions, National Shelter and Community Housing Federation of Australia joined together to hold two National Round Tables in December 2007. Other contributing organizations were the Australian Local Government Association, Construction, Forestry Mining and Energy Union and the Urban Development Institute of Australia. The Brotherhood of St Laurence and Mission Australia provided financial and other support. The main purpose of the Round Tables was to stimulate discussion about principal goals and priorities for a National Affordable Housing Agreement.

The 'Improving Housing Affordability – A Call to Action' comprised the following eight proposals.

1) A New Ministry and Ministerial Council

To appoint a Commonwealth Minister for Housing, Urban and Community Development at Cabinet level and establish a corresponding National Ministerial Council. Allowing a New Ministry and Ministerial Council responding to specifically to housing allows a directed focus on housing, needed in the current era of increased housing unaffordability, which has been rising since the mid-1990's.

2) A National Affordable Housing Agreement

This suggestion is to replace the current Commonwealth-State Housing Agreement (CSHA) which expires in mid-2008 with a newly negotiated National Affordable Housing Agreement. It is outlined that the Agreement should be developed as the first in a series of five-year agreements that provide reasonable predictability about the longer-term future of its initiatives. Measures not currently included in the CSHA, are requested to be included into a National Affordable Housing Agreement to cover a wider range of government measures that closely affect housing affordability, including Commonwealth Rent Assistance, tax benefits and the First Home Owner Grant. 'A Call to Action' states that the new Agreement should aim to develop substantially higher levels of investment in affordable housing on a cost-effective and sustained basis by Commonwealth, State and Local governments and also by institutional investors and non-profit organisations.

3) A National Affordable Housing Goal

A national goal is needed to set a benchmark to achieve and improvement in affordable housing for lower-income households. It is suggested that an appropriate National Affordable Housing Goal would be to "halve by 2025 the proportion of lower-income households who are living in unaffordable housing".

4) Finance for public and non-profit housing

The new Agreement should establish a substantial Capital Grants Program which is limited strictly to capital expenditure by government or non-profit providers for building or buying additional housing.

5) A National Affordable Rental Incentive

The new scheme would be designed to attract substantially increased levels of private investment, especially from large investors, in affordable rental housing for lower-income households.

6) A Residential Infrastructure Fund

The Commonwealth would provide a Residential Infrastructure Fund to help States provide adequate and timely infrastructure for areas in which rapid housing growth is occurring or anticipated. Included is local government planning guidelines on supply of appropriate affordable housing.

7) Commonwealth Expenditure

It is suggested that the Commonwealth should allocate a combined total of at least \$200m to the National Affordable Rental Incentive scheme and the Capital Grants Program in the first year, rising to a total of at least \$500 million per annum by the fifth year.

8) State Expenditure

It is proposed that states also should commit to a five-year program of progressive increases in their funding for public and non-profit housing as part of the National Affordable Housing Agreement.

Shelter WA supports the National Summit on Housing Affordability's 'Call to Action' in the innovative proposals for a national approach to tackling housing affordability in Australia.

To view 'A Call for Action – Improving Housing Affordability', visit <http://www.housingsummit.org.au/>