

## Karel Eringa

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**From:** Karel Eringa [karel@shelterwa.org.au]  
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**To:** Karel Eringa  
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Shelter WA Housing News: 25 March 2004

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### 1. Shelter WA Newsletter: Homelessness in WA

The theme of Shelter WA's March newsletter is Homelessness in WA. The newsletter provides a brief overview of homelessness in WA, including the statistics from the latest census. Overall, the editorial concludes that "it is clear that low cost housing options for people on low incomes have deteriorated over the last few years. This has put increased pressure on vulnerable groups of homeless people, including young people, older people and people with disabilities."

One of the articles in the newsletter highlights how the Commonwealth Government reacted when faced with hard evidence that homelessness continues to be a major problem for around 100,000 Australians. Instead of increasing funding for housing and support services, the relevant Minister used a change in the census counting rules to argue that the number of homeless people in Australia was declining. Other articles include the impact of homelessness on older people, and the extent of homelessness in WA. In addition, there is an article providing some detail on Shelter WA's recent work in the area and an overview of the work of the Homeless Help Line.

Go to [www.shelterwa.org.au](http://www.shelterwa.org.au) (new on this site) to download the newsletter.

### 2. Private Rental Support and Advocacy Service

On 15 March, Community Development Minister Sheila McHale officially launched the Private Rental Support and Advocacy Service. An initiative of the WA State Homelessness Strategy, this new service aims to support landlords, property managers and tenants to work in partnership to prevent homelessness.

The seven services funded through the program will "work with people having difficulty in maintaining tenancies and provide assistance structured around the needs of each person or family." While the service is primarily aimed at private rental tenants it is also available to tenants of community housing.

Services are available in the Perth metropolitan area, as well as Peel, Busselton / Margaret River and Geraldton / Greenough. A specialist Support and Advocacy Service for migrants has also been funded. Contact details are listed in Shelter WA's March newsletter (see above).

### 3. Services First

We are in what is likely to be a federal election year. The Australian

Government has a hefty budget surplus. One of the biggest issues will be whether this is used to improve health, education and community services or to fund income tax cuts.

The Government and the Opposition seem eager to compete over who can offer more generous tax cuts, even though taxpayers received their 'milkshake and sandwich' tax cuts just a year ago. Public opinion is taking a different tack. A recent Newspoll published by The Australian on 23 February found that 72% of respondents preferred more spending on health and education while only 9% preferred a tax cut.

How can we get the parties to listen?

A new group called Services First has been formed to raise awareness in the community of the importance of health, education and community services, the serious problems that beset them, and the risk to their viability posed by another round of tax cuts at this time.

Membership of Services First is diverse. It includes organisations representing services providers and consumers. At this stage, participating organisations include the National Public Hospital Clinician's Task Force, the Royal Australian College of General Practitioners, the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission, the Disability Federation of Australia, Aged and Community Services Australia, the Australian Council of State School Organisations, the Australian Education Union, the National Tertiary Education Union, the Australian Council of Social Service and National Shelter.

The goal of Services First is to get the parties to give priority to investment in services, and better family and social security payments instead of tax cuts, at least over the term of the next Government (the next 3 years).

Services First is non-partisan. It will not endorse or support any political party or candidate for election. However, it will focus on media and marginal electorates to ensure that our message – the need to improve services – gets through in this election year.

From 24 March 2004, you can get further information about Services First from its web site at [www.servicesfirst.org.au](http://www.servicesfirst.org.au). The site offers an opportunity to:

- \* participate in a public survey on services and taxation.
- \* register your interest in the work of the group by lodging an email address to be kept up to date with activities at the national and local level.

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