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Submission on the *Housing Strategy WA* Draft Discussion Paper

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About Shelter WA

Shelter WA is an independent, community based peak body that promotes affordable, accessible, appropriate and secure housing for people on low incomes. Since its establishment in 1979, Shelter WA has worked towards the elimination of homelessness and housing related poverty, focusing particularly on people who have low incomes or who are otherwise disadvantaged in the housing market.

The aim of Shelter WA 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.

In order to coordinate and represent community sector views on housing related issues, Shelter WA regularly seeks input from housing consumers and community groups. In addition to meetings with community members and representatives, Shelter WA uses consultation and information forums and surveys as consultation mechanisms.

Shelter WA produces quarterly newsletters and information sheets, and prepares submissions, reviews, papers and reports on housing related matters. National Shelter, our national affiliate, regularly produces journals and research publications on housing. Both Shelter WA and National Shelter publications are a forum for the views of housing consumers, community groups and policy makers. Many of Shelter WA's publications are also available on the Internet at www.shelterwa.org.au. In addition, Shelter WA is an active member of the Housing Advisory Committee (HAC) that advises the Minister for Housing and the Department of Housing and Works on housing policy and practice and chairs the Homeswest Operational Standing Committee.

Executive Summary

Shelter WA considers the Housing Strategy WA (Draft) to be an important milestone in developing a comprehensive and cohesive map for the future of housing in WA. The breadth of its scope and the development of a whole of government approach to housing is to be applauded.

The significance of the document and its breadth is the recognition that housing is key to the health and welfare of a population. Without adequate, appropriate and affordable accommodation the opportunity for educational, employment and health outcomes are limited. With major changes in demographics and affordability, the release of this strategy is very timely.

This submission is a result of an extensive community consultation process conducted by Shelter WA between December 2005 and February 2006. During this period, Shelter WA conducted 15 focus groups and 7 organisational forums on the *Housing Strategy WA (Draft)*. In all 284 people participated in the consultations.

Consultation with the community ensures that strategies are, and continue to be, appropriate to people's needs. Legitimacy is, therefore, given to both the process undertaken and the outcomes achieved. The concerns, comments and recommendations contained in this report are based on the those discussions.

The following major recommendations were identified for incorporation into the *Housing Strategy WA (Draft)*:

1. Develop strategies with clearly defined goals and performance indicators that are specific, achievable, measurable, realistic, funded and with a timeline for implementation. Participants in forums felt that the emphasis in the Strategy on further reviews and the lack of implementation plans would not effectively achieve the stated broad goals of affordability, accessibility and sustainability.
2. Develop a Public Housing Strategy to firstly clearly define the role of Homeswest. Secondly, in line with the clarified role of Homeswest, develop goals and performance indicators that are specific, achievable, measurable, realistic, funded and have a timeline for implementation. Thirdly, given the above, the role of the Department of Treasury in funding public housing should be made explicit. The aim of a Public Housing Strategy would be to ensure that those people who are on low incomes would have access to an increasing number of high standard housing stock, that is well maintained and appropriate.
3. Develop an Indigenous Housing Strategy in consultation with Indigenous Community Associations that will have clearly defined goals and performance indicators that are specific, achievable, measurable, realistic, funded and with a timeline for implementation.
4. Re-advertise the *Housing Strategy WA (Draft)* once proposed recommendations from the submission have been incorporated into the document. Further consultation is required as the proposed recommendations will have a substantial impact on the Strategy.

Major gaps in the *Housing Strategy WA (Draft)* that were identified through consultation included the following:

- Indigenous people reported many issues for consideration. Of major concern was the need to review, and publicly report on, the outcomes and impact of

the New Living Program on Aboriginal tenants as part of the proposed Strategy 1.10. Further, investigation of the Good Neighbour policy and its outcomes was also requested.

- Migrants and refugees have many issues upon arrival in Australia. Language was a key barrier to housing. People did not fully understand their rights and obligations and made suggestions to empower themselves.
- Given an aging population, the lack of strategies that are to be implemented to meet the needs of seniors was discussed. For those consulted with, aging in place was a major consideration. Physical access and proximity to support services were viewed as major requirements for the retention of independence. Those who chose to live in retirement villages emphasised the need to supply transitional housing on the one site. This enables couples and friends to maintain their relationships despite the differing degrees of medical support they may require.
- While the Strategy proposes further reviews of housing models for Youth, it was considered that this should only be part of a response. Youth housing is required to support youth in the transition to private housing. In order to achieve this goal funding for the Yes, Fresh and similar programs needs to be increased. Concurrent to the development of those programs, Homeswest needs to increase its expenditure on diversifying its housing stock to meet the needs of youth.
- While crisis housing is discussed in the Strategy the degree and diversity of need far outweigh the supply. Limited building programs in the past have exacerbated this situation. Therefore not only is it necessary to ensure that there is a response to homelessness but that more places need to be built as a matter of urgency.
- Street workers, for various reasons, have difficulty accessing most forms of housing that are available. They are therefore at greater risk of homelessness and abuse. A further review of crisis and other forms of housing to understand their needs is required.
- Consultation with the Community Housing providers is required to consider the implications of the Strategy on the sector. While it is acknowledged that efficiencies are required in the sector, the impact of the proposed reform is substantial.
- Boarding and Lodging houses cater for, and provides support to, some of the most vulnerable in society including Mental Health Consumers. However, this type of housing is not addressed the Strategy. Residents of boarding and lodging houses require a higher standard of housing and protection under the Residential Tenancies Act (WA).
- Local government plays a crucial role in implementing the Strategy. It was felt, however, that not enough emphasis was placed on how Local government would achieve the goals of the Strategy, equity, affordability and sustainability. To achieve the goals Local government needs to be empowered through methods including legislation, policy development and co-ordination and funding.

Overall, the consultations identified a widely held view that the proposed strategies over-emphasised further reviews, had limited defined strategies, implementation plans and identified sources of funding. In addition, the consultations yielded a number of suggestions regarding the types of detailed strategies that should be included in the Strategy, which have been amalgamated into 79 recommendations. These recommendations should therefore not be interpreted as an exhaustive list of actions that need to be included in the Strategy, but, rather, as indicators of the types of strategies that should be included.

However, the most important outcome of the consultations was the need for more detail, including performance indicators, timelines for implementation, and designated funding. Shelter WA therefore recommends **that the State Government, in response to community consultation, develop in the *Housing Strategy WA (Draft)* performance indicators that are achievable, measurable, realistic and funded appropriately.** Timelines for implementation are also to be provided. It is anticipated that implementing this recommendation will result in substantial changes to the Strategy. Therefore, Shelter WA further recommends that when the issues regarding implementation and funding have been addressed that the *Housing Strategy WA (Draft)* is re-advertised for further comment.

Recommendations

1. Develop strategies with clearly defined goals and performance indicators that are specific, achievable, measurable, realistic, funded and with a timeline for implementation.
2. That the *Housing Strategy WA (Draft)* be re-advertised for comment when the issues regarding implementation and funding have been addressed by the government.
3. Develop a Public Housing Strategy to: clearly articulate the role of public housing; ensure delivery of appropriate, quality housing that is well maintained; ensure that housing is appropriately located close to services; increase stock by developing clear building targets to meet consumer demand; ensure a diverse housing stock to meet the needs of all those at risk; develop housing that is sustainable and meets universal access principles.
4. Develop an explicit funding agreement between the Department of Housing and the Department of Treasury.
5. Define clear, achievable, measurable, realistic goals with time frames for implementation of the Housing Strategy.
6. Develop whole of government approach to Indigenous Housing by considering employment, justice, health, education, market segmentation, demographics and housing needs with the aim of developing an appropriate Indigenous Housing Strategy.
7. Develop and implement, in consultation with Indigenous Community Associations, an Indigenous Housing Strategy.
8. Develop clearly articulated realistic, measurable and achievable outcomes for Indigenous Housing that are to apply to the private and public sectors in metropolitan, regional and rural areas.
9. That the Indigenous Housing Strategy, but not be limited to, addressing the following: Short term accommodation, including Lodging Houses, for families, women escaping domestic violence and men; develop for the private market, culturally appropriate and environmentally sustainable design guidelines for Indigenous housing according to regional needs.
10. Develop, in consultation with Indigenous Organisations, Home Ownership and Loan Packages that are targeted according to needs of different demographic groups eg. Seniors, Young Families
11. Consideration be given as to how the *Housing Strategy WA (Draft)* will be co-ordinated at a whole of government level to achieve successful and effective housing outcomes.
12. Review the Residential Tenancies Act (WA) with the aim of ensuring affordable housing
13. Develop a partnership with REIWA to promote responsible real estate agent practises.
14. Implement all the State Homelessness Strategy recommendations.
15. Create in conjunction with REIWA promotional packages to encourage Aboriginal people in to real estate and establish career paths for them.
16. Develop as a matter of urgency housing strategies, in consultation with Indigenous Community Groups, for Indigenous Youth to minimise re-offending in accordance with the recommendation 34, Mahoney Inquiry.
17. Review, and publicly report on, the outcomes and impact of the New Living Program on Aboriginal tenants as part of the proposed Strategy 1.10.

18. Investigate and publicly report on the outcomes of the Good Neighbour Policy, including monitoring the numbers of evictions, the process eviction and who has been affected.
19. Implement any changes as recommended by the review of the New Living Program and Good Neighbour Policy to ensure that people are housed appropriately according to their need.
20. Develop Leadership Training Packages for DHW Managers in selection and employment of suitable staff, training staff, implementation of policies and increasing cultural awareness.
21. Change the criteria for Homeswest priority housing to include youth and apprentices
22. Review placement processes to ensure safety of women leaving domestic violence
23. Investigate levels and fairness of charges for maintenance contracts, passing on of charges, accountability of deductions and methods of communicating with tenants
24. Homeswest develop, in consultation with Indigenous Community Groups, a Home Support Package for tenants, with skills taught by Indigenous People. Develop a reward/incentive package for attending the course.
25. Homeswest develop Indigenous Design Guidelines, in consultation with Indigenous Community Groups, for culturally appropriate and environmentally sustainable houses that are suitable to different regions needs, including metropolitan Perth.
26. Increase construction of Homeswest houses that meet new Indigenous Design Guidelines
27. Increase the supply of housing for Indigenous Seniors in order to meet their diverse needs.
28. Develop a policy to employ Indigenous People, with specific targets including career paths, throughout Homeswest.
29. Implementation of Rent-Buy scheme for Homeswest tenants
30. Review income assessment levels of Homeswest tenants with the view to creating incentives for minimising work force disincentives, increasing savings and home ownership.
31. Transferral of the management/ownership of Homeswest houses that are in good condition to Aboriginal Organisations
32. Homeswest develop an easy to read book on the rights and obligations of tenants
33. Homeswest develop training packages for clients and Indigenous support services on the rights and obligations of tenants.
34. Improved, co-ordinated and funded support programs for Migrants and Refugees be provided for up to one year with the aim of reducing the incidence of housing crises.
35. REIWA to create career paths and training for people of various ethnic origins with the aim of providing services to migrants.
36. Need more information to be given to refugees as to how to access housing.
37. That Community Legal Centres and REIWA develop a policy that supports and communicates the rights of migrants and refugees to them in the most accessible manner. That the policy include but not be limited to the taking of photographs to compliment property condition reports, dot point summaries of lease agreements in the language of origin and in plain English.
38. The Insurance sector to broaden the scope of land lord insurance.

39. Introduce legislation that abolishes option fees and limits the number of applications that any landlord can consider at one time and the time that they can be held.
40. Where barriers to private rental housing exist, the criteria of providing evidence of rejection by private landlords to Homeswest should be waved.
41. Diversification of Homeswest housing stock to include a program of building 4-7 bedroom houses.
42. Integration of Homeswest Right to Buy and Eligibility Policies to minimise work force disincentives and increase home ownership rates.
43. Development and implementation of Affordable Housing Strategies to be enable Local Councils to be proactive and provide affordable housing and associated support services.
44. That the implementation of Strategies regarding Seniors Housing should be a high priority for Government.
45. Review the R-Codes to address the requirement of higher density and access to services to ensure that Seniors feel safe.
46. Implementation of Universal Access in the Building Codes of Australia and Local Housing Strategies.
47. Locate accommodation for the well aged and the frail aged on the same location in accordance with the principles of aging in place.
48. Increase the range of services discussed in Strategy 5.10 to include access to Community Centres and access to supported transport.
49. That Park Home Ownership be recognised as a viable affordable housing alternative in the *Housing Strategy WA (Draft)*.
50. That Park Home Owners be given greater security of tenure through the following; requiring the retention of residential parks through the R-Codes and Town Planning Schemes; developing financial incentives for people to operate residential parks; that State and Local governments form a partnership to own and operate Residential Parks.
51. Development of tax incentives for developers to diversify housing stock and meet needs of those at risk.
52. Develop innovative means of housing and supporting youth as a transition into private housing.
53. Homeswest increase expenditure on diverse housing stock to meet demand.
54. Increase funding for YES and FRESH, and similar programs.
55. Link housing and employment strategies.
56. Build a variety of crisis accommodation in regional and metropolitan areas, that is located close to support services and transport, that meet growing and diverse needs of people including, men, women, refugees, men or women with families, Indigenous people and youth.
57. Adequately fund new and existing crisis accommodation for the provision of services and with appropriate levels of staffing and management.
58. Alignment of crisis housing exit points with Homeswest priority housing and an Affordable Housing Strategy.
59. Facilitate the transition to housing by developing and strengthening relationships between Homeswest and Refugees.
60. Increase the funding of the Homeless Helpline and Mensline.
61. Undertake further research in conjunction with Street worker support services into addressing the housing needs of street workers.
62. Development of medium term accommodation designed to meet a variety of needs.

63. Recognition of the impact of divorce and secondary homelessness upon men.
64. Investigate methods to support people in the transition after separation to find appropriate accommodation and any associated issues
65. Investigate methods of financially supporting men in setting up a second home.
66. Investigate the role and powers of police to ensure that men upon release from prison are able to access appropriate accommodation.
67. Develop a timeline for the proposed review in Strategy 5.9 to be completed and recommendations to be implemented
68. That implementation of Community Housing sector reforms be subject to further consultation with the various stakeholders with the aim of finding a suitable number of housing organisations that both maximises the strengths of the sector and minimises inefficiencies.
69. Develop a whole of government approach to housing and the provision of services for mental health consumers
70. Develop requirements for increasing density and diversity that facilitates community development and meets the needs those at risk through Local Housing Strategies.
71. Increase the provision of affordable housing including developing a strategy to increase the stock of boarding and lodging houses. This could be achieved by converting empty office buildings; constructing purpose built facilities; providing tax incentives for the private developers.
72. Increase support for both the owner and tenants of boarding houses and lodging houses by providing support workers and a first aid post.
73. Develop set of measurable and achievable goals with regards to the provision of diverse stock, affordable, appropriate housing to guide Regional and Local Housing Strategies.
74. Investigate, in consultation with WALGA, methods of empowering local government to achieve housing outcomes including funding and policy development.
75. Recognise the diversity of local government.
76. Develop a set of guidelines for dealing with developers that can be applied across the local government sector.
77. Ensure that support services for communities are considered through a whole of government response to housing.
78. Develop further links with *Network City* to ensure a common vision for housing and sustainability.
79. Explore the link between community development, demographic change, density, sustainability, transport, open space and affordability.

1. Introduction

Shelter WA considers the *Housing Strategy WA (Draft)* to be an important milestone in developing a comprehensive and cohesive map for the future of housing in WA. The breadth of its scope and the development of a whole of government approach to housing is to be applauded.

The significance of the document and its breadth is the recognition that housing is key to the health and welfare of a population. Without adequate, appropriate and affordable accommodation the opportunity for educational, employment and health outcomes are limited. With major changes in demographics and affordability, the release of this strategy is very timely.

Given the unique nature and the future implications of the Strategy, Shelter WA considered that its role, as an advocate, is to voice consumers' concerns regarding housing. Only through extensive consultation can the legitimacy of any proposed response be assured. Consequently, Shelter WA, to do justice to the diversity of views expressed, has not conducted a detailed analysis of the Strategy. The basis for Shelter WA's report, key recommendations and comments are the responses from 284 people who attended a series of 15 community focus groups and 7 organisational forums. Reports on some of these forums are available separately on the Internet at www.shelterwa.org.au.

Consultation emphasised the need for the Strategy to develop appropriately detailed responses to housing issues. Strategies that have identified outcomes, timelines for implementation and are adequately funded are required. Those consulted with believed that the proposed strategies placed an over emphasis on further reviews, had limited defined strategies, implementation plans and identified sources of funding.

Consequently, Shelter WA recommends that the State Government, in response to community consultation, develop in the *Housing Strategy WA (Draft)* performance indicators that are achievable, measurable, realistic and are funded. Timelines for implementation are to be provided. When the issues regarding implementation and funding have been addressed by the government, the *Housing Strategy WA (Draft)* is to be re-advertised for further comment.

2. Consultation

2.1 Forums

The goals of the forums were to firstly, consult with peak bodies and service providers and, secondly, to develop an overall picture of the capacity of the Strategy to meet the needs of various demographic groups. In all 7 forums were held. Attendees, 120 in total, came from across the community sector to discuss how the strategy would impact on their clients' ability to meet their housing needs. In addition, a Youth Forum was conducted in 2003 as part of the WA Housing Strategy series of Issues Papers.¹ The forums provided both verification of what was being discussed in the focus groups but also viewed housing from the perspective of implementing and funding the Strategy over time to meet stated objectives. The details of the forums are outlined in Table 1.

Housing Strategy WA (Draft) Forum Details			
	Forum	Target Group	Attendees
1	Shelter WA & WACOSS, West Perth	Community Service Providers	32
2	Shelter WA & Equal Opportunity Commission, Perth	Indigenous Service Providers	23
3	Shelter WA & Tenants Advise Service	Tenants Advocacy Service Providers	20
4	Shelter WA & Men's Advisory Network	Service Providers for Men	10
5	Shelter WA & Multicultural Services, North Perth	Multi-cultural Service providers	20
6	Shelter WA & DHW (conducted in preparation for the State Housing Strategy)	Youth	8
7	Shelter WA and DHW Mandurah Forum	Regional Areas	15
	Total number of attendees		120

Table 1: Housing Strategy WA (Draft) Peak Body Forums

The organisations consulted were generally supportive of the fact that the *Housing Strategy WA (Draft)* had been developed and that a comprehensive discussion on housing was occurring. Further, representatives welcomed the whole of government approach taken in the document.

However, concerns were raised at the forums regarding the limited plans for implementation and funding for the strategy. Issues regarding the mechanisms for communicating between departments were also discussed. Major gaps in the strategy that were identified included;

¹ Department of Housing and Works & Shelter WA, 2003, *Housing Strategy WA; Issues Paper*, Government of Western Australia, Perth.

- Lack of performance indicators that are achievable, measurable and realistic;
- Need for a Public Housing Strategy that had clearly defined the role of Homeswest, identified realistic, measurable, achievable housing targets and was well funded;
- Need for an Indigenous Housing Strategy that had clearly defined realistic, measurable, achievable housing targets and was well funded.
- Consideration of the connection between housing, re-offending and the role of the Department of Justice needs to be undertaken;
- Lack of reference to boarding and lodging houses;
- Lack of detailed response, and corresponding implementation plans, for housing Seniors
- Lack of reference to, and integration with, existing strategies including the Homelessness Strategy and the Equal Opportunity Commission's *Finding Place Report*;

2.2 Focus Groups

A total of 164 housing consumers attended 15 focus groups throughout the metropolitan area. The aims of the sessions were to go out to existing community groups, discuss housing in an informal, comfortable environment and maximise the capacity to reach housing consumers. In this manner a comprehensive appreciation of housing needs was developed. Consumers suggested a number of solutions for government to consider. The groups of people consulted included Seniors, Indigenous people, Migrants and Refugees, Women, Mental Health consumers, Park Home Owners, Homeswest Tenants, people at risk in general. The details of the groups visited are outlined in Table 2.

Housing Strategy WA (Draft) Focus Group Details			
	Focus Group Name	Target Group	Attendees
1	Tresillian Community Centre, Nedlands	Seniors	5
2	Ex-Street Worker	Women	1
3	Asetts - United Voices Client Reference Group, Northbridge	Refugees	5
4	Loftus Community Centre, Leederville	Seniors	13
5	The Meeting Place – Grow Support Group, Fremantle	Mental Health Consumers	5
6	Park Home Owners Association, Manning	Park Home Owners	60
7	Rockingham Autumn Centre, Rockingham	Seniors	15
8	Maamba Aboriginal Corporation – Women's Group, East Cannington	Aboriginal people	5
9	Maamba Aboriginal Corporation – Men's Group, East Cannington	Aboriginal people	3
10	Yorgum Family Counselling Services, East Perth	Aboriginal people	4
11	Multicultural Services, North Perth	Migrants and Refugees	5

12	Edmund Rice Centre, Mirrabooka	Migrants and Refugees	24 (including 7 interpreters)
13	The Big Issue	People at Risk	7
14	Asetts - United Voices Client Reference Group, Northbridge	Refugees	7
15	Mercy Family Centre, Koondoola	Homeswest tenants	5
Total number of attendees			164

Table 2: Community Consultation: *Housing Strategy WA (Draft)* focus groups

Issues that arose included:

- Lack of affordable housing
- Lack of crisis housing for a range of people including families
- Lack of consumer knowledge about their rights
- Need for diverse housing stock

3. Overview of Responses

3.1 Implementation

The issue of implementation of the Strategy was discussed at many forums. The Strategy has many layers within it. Participants at forums were concerned over the lack of clarity as to how the strategy would be implemented.

The lack of clarity raised issues as to the successful co-ordination of a whole of government approach and its effectiveness on the ground to achieve housing outcomes. Concerns were also raised regarding the number of strategies that did not have measurable, realistic and achievable goals. Often the only goal that was stated was to conduct further reviews. Frustration was expressed at the lack of strategies that could be implemented to achieve outcomes for people affected by inappropriate and unaffordable housing.

3.2 Housing Affordability

Throughout the consultation period many people considered affordability to be one of the major areas impacting on the public. Some people felt that private landlords and real estate agents should be held accountable for the increase in the cost of housing.

Proposed mechanisms for increasing accountability for landlords included adjusting the Residential Tenancies Act (WA). Changes in regulation regarding the interval, and extent, of rental increases were suggested. It was reported that rental increases every six months were contributing to the escalation in costs and forcing people to move.

It was felt that Real Estate agents should also be controlled by REIWA so that house prices would not be artificially driven up. Further, members of the public had the perception that investors are trading in houses with the effect of driving up prices. People commented that this form of trading was immoral and was forcing others out of the housing market. The consequences were that this was then increasing the differences between those who could support themselves and those unable to do so. Further, anecdotal evidence suggested that often the combination of personal debt and housing debt meant that some people were not able to eat.

Increasing the pressure on families was the perception that it was necessary for two people to work in order to buy a house. Further, it was reported that in the private rental market, those houses that are affordable go quickly, making the competition very tight. Those with lack of transport or limited English skills have difficulty getting to a location to apply for the house. Consequently, migrants and refugees often miss out on opportunities.

Consultation revealed the perception of a growing dependence on Homeswest for housing. Lack of affordable housing is the main contributing factor. Some people felt that home ownership is impossible. Whether people were refugees, migrants or Seniors, they were concerned about their potential inability to house themselves in now and in the future. Some Seniors, particularly those who were renting, given declining health and income, felt at risk. Those Seniors who reported feeling secure had long term tenancies with the same landlord and their rent had not increased to current market rates. As a majority of Seniors spoken to lived off their savings, minimal changes in rent were necessary to maintain their sense of security.

One organisation that provides affordable housing, Perth Inner City Housing Association, was considered highly in several focus groups and forums. It was considered that they provided affordable, appropriate housing that was well maintained and organised. People reported feeling safe and welcomed.

3.3 Homeswest

At the joint Shelter WA/EOC forum it was debated whether or not there should be a separate Public Housing Strategy. The objective of a separate Public Housing Strategy would be to clearly enunciate the role of Homeswest. It would, it was felt, acknowledge that some people will not, for a variety of reasons, be able to enter the private market.

At the forum the principle that government has a role to ensure that those in the margins and on low incomes have an adequate safety net was re-iterated. Therefore a Public Housing Strategy would also clearly articulate goals to meet those needs. Those goals would include diversifying and increasing housing stock, address maintenance issues, and ensure that housing is sustainable and meets universal access principles. For detailed discussion on Homeswest refer to further sections of this report.

While the *Housing Strategy WA (Draft)* acknowledges the government's role as a housing provider, the perception at the forum was that the strategy emphasised the role of the developer as a source of revenue and a provider of affordable housing. Further, with Homeswest also engaging in land development, that the line between supporting those at risk and being a source of finance, blurred social responsibility goals. It was felt that the role of the Homeswest was, therefore, confused.

The issue of separation of roles and responsibilities of housing and funding highlights the need to develop, and make explicit, the role of the Dept. of Treasury in funding public housing.

Recommendations:

- **Define clear, achievable, measurable, realistic goals with time frames for implementation of the Housing Strategy.**
- **Consideration be given as to how the *Housing Strategy WA (Draft)* will be co-ordinated at a whole of government level to achieve successful and effective housing outcomes.**
- **Review the Residential Tenancies Act (WA) with the aim of ensuring affordable housing**
- **Develop a partnership with REIWA to promote responsible real estate agent practises.**
- **Develop a Public Housing Strategy to: clearly articulate the role of public housing; ensure delivery of appropriate, quality housing that is well maintained; ensure that housing is appropriately located close to services; increase stock by developing clear building targets to meet consumer demand; ensure a diverse housing stock to meet the needs of all those at risk; develop housing that is sustainable and meets universal access principles.**
- **Develop an explicit funding agreement between the Department of Housing and the Department of Treasury.**
- **That the *Housing Strategy WA (Draft)* be re-advertised for comment when the issues regarding implementation and funding have been addressed by the government.**

4. Housing for Indigenous People

4.1 Overview

4.1.1 Implementation

In the Focus Groups and the joint Shelter WA/EOC Forum, it was seen that the *Housing Strategy WA (Draft)* have strategies and outcomes that are specific for Aboriginal people. Conversations with Indigenous people centred on the following key issues: crisis housing; discrimination; the impact of current Homeswest policies; increasing home ownership. Stable housing was seen as key to positive employment, justice, health and educational outcomes.

It was noted that the Equal Opportunity Commission report, 'Finding a Place', was not referred to in the housing strategy.²

The possibility of having an Indigenous Housing Strategy was discussed. However, it was agreed that an Indigenous Housing Strategy should acknowledge the diversity of Aboriginal people and their situations. Consequently, any proposed strategy should be able to draw upon funds from a variety of sources, for example for Seniors, disabilities etc according to need.

Of major concern in the various groups was the low life expectancy of Indigenous people. It was noted that due to poor life expectancy, the length of the strategy and ill defined timelines for implementation, that Indigenous people, particularly young men, would not be alive to benefit from the *Housing Strategy WA (Draft)*. This example further emphasises the necessity for the strategy to be given timelines and goals for implementation.

4.1.2 Home Ownership

Home Ownership is seen as a key element of providing stability for Aboriginal people. Stable housing contributes to general well being, improved health, and stable employment.

Levels of home ownership were seen to be affected by work force disincentives and the ability to get a deposit. Therefore, Homeswest eligibility criteria and income assessment levels can act as a disincentive for employment. When people got a job, they were moving into the private rental market and paying much higher rents. However, the impact of the high rents was that the ability to save for a house deposit was diminished.

With regards to deposits, some queried whether or not the Strategy would take over and implement the loan schemes that were available under ATSIC. It was seen that this would be a very positive move if these loans were available.

4.1.3 Crisis Housing

While crisis housing is necessary in remote and regional areas, metropolitan crisis housing needs to be addressed as a matter of urgency. Anecdotal evidence suggested that crisis housing for families and short term accommodation for people

² Equal Opportunity Commission 2004, *Finding a Place*, Government of Western Australia, Perth.

visiting from the regions are full. Consequently, people's options are to sleep in parks or stay with family. Hence, those people who are in crisis are put at further risk or are contributing to over crowding issues.

The forums conducted called upon the government to fund and implement all the recommendations of the State Homelessness Strategy. It is necessary to provide short term and crisis accommodation in Perth for Aboriginal people. While some recommendations have been implemented the overall success of the Strategy is limited if crisis accommodation is not provided. A site for suitable short term accommodation may be difficult to identify, however the alternative of endangering women and children, in particular, was considered unacceptable.

Consideration needs to be taken of providing crisis housing for families. Women escaping domestic violence, with older male children, were not able to use those facilities. Otherwise the youth was expected to stay with the father in an unsafe situation.

Exacerbating the lack of short term accommodation for Indigenous people is the reported closure of Boarding and Lodging houses in metropolitan Perth.³ It was mentioned at the Shelter WA/EOC forum that this form of housing was particularly used by males. It was reported that closure of the Boarding and Lodging Houses could be a contributor to increasing homelessness. No mention is made in the *Housing Strategy WA (Draft)* report as to the role that Boarding and Lodging houses have in the provision of accommodation. This needs to be addressed.

For a general discussion on Crisis Housing see the separate heading below.

4.1.4 Discrimination

As discussed elsewhere, discrimination in housing is a common complaint. The experience of discrimination is heightened when there is a shortage of affordable and appropriate housing. In the private rental market the real estate agent is in a powerful position when demand and competition for housing is high.

A strategy that was discussed to overcome discrimination was to increase the number of Aboriginal real estate agents. This strategy could help overcome language, cultural and increase accessibility issues.

4.1.5 Youth

Youth housing was of particular concern for participants. Indigenous Youth were seen to be particularly vulnerable given incidences of domestic violence, unemployment, age and imprisonment. It was noted in various forums that stable housing for this group would help minimise occurrences of re-offending. Particular reference was made to the Mahoney Inquiry and its links between the supply of housing and the occurrence of re-offending.⁴ For this to be achieved, several strategies were considered. These included:

³ Community Housing Coalition of WA, Equal Opportunity Commission, Northern Suburbs Legal Centre, St Patrick's, St Vincent de Paul, Shelter WA, Tenants Advice Service, Western Australian Association for Mental Health 2006, Response to the Department of Housing and Works Housing Strategy WA Draft Discussion Paper from the 'Where will they Live?' Campaign stakeholders, Perth.

⁴ Mahoney D. 2005, 'Inquiry into the Management of Offenders in Custody and in the Community', Department of Justice, Perth.

- Supplying housing for apprentices in rural and regional WA
- Changing the criteria for Homeswest priority housing to include youth

Recommendation:

- **Develop whole of government approach to Indigenous Housing by considering employment, justice, health, education, market segmentation, demographics and housing needs with the aim of developing an appropriate Indigenous Housing Strategy.**
- **Develop and implement, in consultation with Indigenous Community Associations, an Indigenous Housing Strategy.**
- **Develop clearly articulated realistic, measurable and achievable outcomes for Indigenous Housing that are to apply to the private and public sectors in metropolitan, regional and rural areas.**
- **That the Indigenous Housing Strategy, but not be limited to, addressing the following: Short term accommodation, including Lodging Houses, for families, women escaping domestic violence and men; develop for the private market, culturally appropriate and environmentally sustainable design guidelines for Indigenous housing according to regional needs.**
- **Develop, in consultation with Indigenous Organisations, Home Ownership and Loan Packages that are targeted according to needs of different demographic groups eg. Seniors, Young Families**
- **Implement all the State Homelessness Strategy recommendations.**
- **Create in conjunction with REIWA promotional packages to encourage Aboriginal people in to real estate and establish career paths for them.**
- **Develop as a matter of urgency housing strategies, in consultation with Indigenous Community Groups, for Indigenous Youth to minimise re-offending in accordance with the recommendation 34, Mahoney Inquiry.**

4.2 Homeswest: Current Policies

4.2.1 New Living and Good Neighbours Policies

The New Living Program and the Good Neighbours Policy and their impacts were considered by those interviewed to have a very detrimental effect on Aboriginal Communities and their sense of well being.

As a result of the New Living Program, it was perceived that Aboriginal people were being moved either to the outer metropolitan or to areas where they felt unwelcome. They stated that houses for Aboriginal people were not being replaced in suburbs where they currently lived. The impact was that Indigenous people were being removed from schools, services, and community groups. The alleged overall effect was to increase the perception of racism and that nothing was being achieved.

Indigenous people spoken to felt that both the New Living Program and the Good Neighbours Policy set them up to fail. Inappropriate housing was a significant contributor to overcrowding, scabies, head lice and conflict with neighbours. There are reports of instances of people being offered inappropriate housing and then being told that if it was not taken then they would go to the bottom of the list. It was argued that if women with many children and grandparents were placed in three bedroom houses with only a small courtyard, then noise would be an issue. The consequence

was that complaints would be made through the Good Neighbours policy. People reported feeling powerless and discriminated against. Further, they felt that there was an assumption of guilt when a complaint was made.

The Stronger Families Program had been utilized to resolve neighbourhood conflict. However, it was reported that officers from the various departments did not show up to meetings. The outcome was that participants felt that the program was ineffective. Often if any housing situation was to be resolved, it was reliant upon the leadership of a single person in management and their personal intervention.

The above highlights a need to further research the impact of both the New Living Program and the Good Neighbour Policy on Aboriginal tenants. The aim of the research would be to ensure that people are being located in appropriate housing according to need.

4.2.2 Youth

For discussion on Indigenous Youth refer to the appropriate section of this report.

4.2.3 Work Place Disincentives

For the discussion on the impact of Homeswest policies, work place disincentives and Home Ownership refer to the General section of Housing for Indigenous People. Further in depth analysis of this issue refer to a recent Shelter WA's paper on Work Force disincentives.⁵

4.2.4 Placement

It was reported that women escaping domestic violence were being housed in close proximity to their ex-partners. The consequence was that the violence continued. The concern was raised to highlight that the process of placing people needed to be reviewed and ensure that the placement was appropriate.

4.2.5 Maintenance

Maintenance contracts drew much discussion. People felt that maintenance charges by contractors were too high. While the contractors had been well paid it was Aboriginal people who footed the bill. Often people were unaware of why money was being deducted from their accounts. The problem was two fold. Firstly, the language used in letters was very complicated and hard to understand. Secondly, people did not know their rights in how to challenge deductions made. As a result of their payments, Aboriginal people felt they were disempowered, did not have enough money for food, nor could they budget.

Recommendations:

- **Review, and publicly report on, the outcomes and impact of the New Living Program on Aboriginal tenants as part of the proposed Strategy 1.10.**

⁵ Eringa, K. Anthony, J. 2005, *Financial Workforce Disincentives in Public Housing; Shelter WA Occasional Paper 2005-1*, Shelter WA, 2005.

- Investigate and publicly report on the outcomes of the Good Neighbour Policy, including monitoring the numbers of evictions, the process eviction and who has been affected.
- Implement any changes as recommended by the review of the New Living Program and Good Neighbour Policy to ensure that people are housed appropriately according to their need.
- Develop Leadership Training Packages for DHW Managers in selection and employment of suitable staff, training staff, implementation of policies and increasing cultural awareness.
- Change the criteria for Homeswest priority housing to include youth and apprentices
- Review placement processes to ensure safety of women leaving domestic violence
- Investigate levels and fairness of charges for maintenance contracts, passing on of charges, accountability of deductions and methods of communicating with tenants

4.3 Homeswest: Future Policy Directions

4.3.1 Initiatives

Proposals were made to facilitate the capacity of Homeswest to meet the needs of Indigenous people. Some indicated that increasing people's capacity for home management skills and home ownership should be high priorities for the future.

Home Support packages, similar to the Home Maker Scheme, were seen as positive. However, it was noted that the programs had to work in conjunction with other recommendations to work. For example, as one person noted, how can people be taught how to budget if, after all the payments had been taken out of their Centrelink payments, there is no money to budget with. Consequently, deductions had to be reviewed, accountable and explained clearly before budgeting skills could be taught effectively. Similar dynamics are encountered when considering increasing maintenance skills. Over crowding issues must be addressed for maintenance and increasing skills to be effective.

Another initiative suggested was for Homeswest to develop culturally appropriate and environmentally sustainable housing for Indigenous people throughout WA, including the metropolitan area.

The future of Seniors was also discussed. One group suggested that consideration should be given to an Indigenous Seniors Free Rent Scheme. While it is acknowledged that many Indigenous Seniors may not have worked and would not have superannuation their financial situation is outside the scope of this report. However, Shelter WA does that this highlights a case to increase the supply of Homeswest houses for this group. The significant role that Indigenous Seniors play as Carers has an impact on the type of housing required. Consequently, any discussion as to the best method of addressing Seniors Housing should address the variety of demands placed upon them.

4.3.2 Rights of Homeswest tenants

The rights of tenants were a major issue for housing consumers who attended focus groups and for staff at Community Centres. Often tenants would go to Community

Centres for information and help. It was felt that Centres acted as a go between with Homeswest. It was felt that if Homeswest educated consumers by making regular visits to Centres to discuss issues and inform people then much misinformation and misunderstanding would be prevented.

As a follow up, training could also be given to Centre staff on Homeswest policies and their clients' rights and obligations. Using easy to understand language, a book should be developed as a resource for both centres and Homeswest when explaining issues.

All the above would give Aboriginal people and their support services a sense of empowerment.

Recommendations:

- **Homeswest develop, in consultation with Indigenous Community Groups, a Home Support Package for tenants, with skills taught by Indigenous People. Develop a reward/incentive package for attending the course.**
- **Homeswest develop Indigenous Design Guidelines, in consultation with Indigenous Community Groups, for culturally appropriate and environmentally sustainable houses that are suitable to different regions needs, including metropolitan Perth.**
- **Increase construction of Homeswest houses that meet new Indigenous Design Guidelines**
- **Increase the supply of housing for Indigenous Seniors in order to meet their diverse needs.**
- **Develop a policy to employ Indigenous People, with specific targets including career paths, throughout Homeswest.**
- **Implementation of Rent-Buy scheme for Homeswest tenants**
- **Review income assessment levels of Homeswest tenants with the view to creating incentives for minimising work force disincentives, increasing savings and home ownership.**
- **Transferral of the management/ownership of Homeswest houses that are in good condition to Aboriginal Organisations**
- **Homeswest develop an easy to read book on the rights and obligations of tenants**
- **Homeswest develop training packages for clients and Indigenous support services on the rights and obligations of tenants.**

5. Housing Refugees and Migrants

5.1 Support

Migrants are offered a variety of support ranging from 3 days to a year, depending on the organisation and type of visa entry. A common problem that was encountered by service providers was that clients did not follow through with the help offered. The consequence was that migrants did not know their rights' did not understand the system and did not look for help until they were desperate and a crisis occurred. From consultations with refugees, they felt that they did not want to be a burden and were grateful to be in Australia. However, overcoming obstacles of discrimination and lack of language skills put them, and their children, in an at risk situation.

Those migrants and refugees who had had a positive experience stated that they had been welcomed by local ethnic communities. Service providers felt that improved, co-ordinated and funded induction programs providing support for up to a year could help prevent crises from occurring. This preventative approach would diminish the pressure on crisis housing providers, including Homeswest.

People who had gotten to know their rights felt that this was due to the intervention of community legal centre employees that had had previous professional experience with migrants and had been known in the community. It was considered that the provision of legal support was ad hoc and was a much needed source of support.

5.2 Discrimination

Discrimination was regarded by this group to be an important factor in not being able to obtain housing in the private sector. Often they felt that real estate agents are faced with large numbers of people applying to rent homes. They felt that real estate agents did not select immigrants on the basis of having large families, colour, accent and the perception of being poor tenants.

Those tenants who did not feel discrimination and were able to find housing with relative ease, were those people who knew real estate agents who were of the same ethnic background and language. This was the particularly the case for the Bosnian refugees.

It would be recommended that people of various ethnic background and language groups be employed as real estate agents.

5.3 Private rental

Service providers reported that refugees often did not know how the private rental system worked. They did not understand how to renew leases nor fill out application forms. Those who felt empowered had been given, upon taking a lease, photographs to compliment the property condition report. This initiative had aided people's ability to overcome language difficulties. Another suggestion included the provision of dot point summaries of lease conditions, in both English and the language of origin, for people to refer to at a later date.

Due to the high demand for large rental homes and requirement to pay an application fee, people could not afford to apply for more than one or two houses a week. Due to lack of transport, it was often reported that not only was it difficult to view a

property but then also get the money back. Consequently, due to a number of factors, refugees had diminished opportunities to gain housing in a competitive environment.

Option fees represent a financial barrier to housing for low income tenants. In addition, option fees limit tenants' housing choices were they cannot afford to pay more than one option fee per fortnight. At the same time there are no regulations as to how many option fees owners can hold putting tenants at a disadvantage relative to owners. Anecdotal evidence suggests that often more than fifteen applications are accepted by agents. Shelter WA therefore recommends that option fees be abolished as an unnecessary barrier to access. If option fees are retained, Shelter WA recommends that owners should be able to charge only one such fee for a property at any given time.⁶

The need to address the legitimate concerns of private landlords was discussed. One means of addressing these was to lobby the insurance sector to broaden the scope of landlord insurance. In this way landlords would be encouraged to house larger migrant families.

5.4 Homeswest

The need to provide Homeswest evidence of rejection by private rentals was regarded as a barrier to housing. Due to factors discussed above such as lack of transport and English skills, evidence is difficult to obtain. These criteria reinforce the perception of discrimination. Therefore it was recommended that for groups, such as large families and migrants, were it can be identified that barriers do occur, then this criteria should be waved.

Large families are also affected by the lack of 4-5 bedroom houses. It was noted that Homeswest in diversifying its housing stock should increase the number of houses to cater for this demographic group.

As discussed earlier in relation to the private market, information was seen to be a key factor in relationships with migrants. People did not understand their rights or what options were available to them. The suggestion made at the Multicultural Services Forum was that Homeswest should develop a Shared Equity policy The effect would be that people, once they understand their rights, would opt to buy the property and home ownership rates would be increased.

Work force disincentives are a barrier to home ownership. As discussed in the Indigenous Housing section, eligibility limits need to be reviewed with the aim to increasing savings and home ownership levels.

Crisis housing for refugees and migrants is discussed under a separate heading.

Recommendations:

- **Improved, co-ordinated and funded support programs for Migrants and Refugees be provided for up to one year with the aim of reducing the incidence of housing crises.**
- **REIWA to create career paths and training for people of various ethnic origins with the aim of providing services to migrants.**

⁶ Eringa K. 2002, *A Balanced Act? Submission to the Statutory Review of the WA Residential Tenancies Act 1987*, Shelter WA, p.14.

- **Need more information to be given to refugees as to how to access housing.**
- **That Community Legal Centres and REIWA develop a policy that supports and communicates the rights of migrants and refugees to them in the most accessible manner. That the policy include but not be limited to the taking of photographs to compliment property condition reports, dot point summaries of lease agreements in the language of origin and in plain English.**
- **The Insurance sector to broaden the scope of land lord insurance.**
- **Introduce legislation that abolishes option fees and limits the number of applications that any landlord can consider at one time and the time that they can be held.**
- **Where barriers to private rental housing exist, the criteria of providing evidence of rejection by private landlords to Homeswest should be waved.**
- **Diversification of Homeswest housing stock to include a program of building 4-7 bedroom houses.**
- **Integration of Homeswest Right to Buy and Eligibility Polices to minimise work force disincentives and increase home ownership rates.**

6. Seniors' Housing

6.1 Implementation

As WA is characterised by an aging population, the need for housing for Seniors should be seen as a top priority for government with strategies being identified and implemented promptly. None of the strategies for Seniors have been given a timeline for implementation. The general fear expressed was that by the time a strategy was designed and implemented, the baby boomers, who are the largest population group, would not be alive to benefit from the diversified housing stock.

6.2 Affordable Housing

A key feature of the consultations with Seniors was the demand that Local Councils become heavily involved in housing provision. The key reason stated was that they would be able to provide affordable rental accommodation. Affordable rental accommodation would target two groups. The first were those Seniors who reported that it was cheaper for them to sell their houses, rather than get an equity loan to fund their retirement. The Seniors could then be, at least partially, self-funded retirees without the burden of repayments. Secondly, those Seniors who had been in the private rental market all their lives, did not know how to plan for their future. Both parties were concerned about the increasing cost of private rental.

The City of Subiaco Affordable Housing Program was cited, on numerous occasions, as an example for all Councils to follow. The perception was that an affordable Housing Program enabled a Council to aide people retain their dignity, independence and remain close to all services. An alternative suggestion to housing provision, would be for Councils to provide Community Buses so that people could live further away from services, pay lower rents and still remain independent. Seniors were often reluctant to call for help from their children as they 'did not want to be a burden'.

While Affordable Housing Strategies should be an integral part of Regional and Local Housing Strategies (Strategy 5.10), given the length of time taken to develop Regional and Local strategies, lack of identified timelines for implementing housing Strategies for Seniors and the concern that the bulk of the baby boomers could be entering the frail aged housing market by the time any of the above can be implemented, there is a greater need for Local Councils to be proactive in developing both housing strategies for diversifying housing stock, provision of housing for Seniors and Affordable Housing Policies.

6.3 High Density and Zoning: impact on lifestyle

A major finding of the Focus Groups for Seniors has implications for Seniors who wanted to down size but did not want to move into a lifestyle village, were buying units that are close to facilities such as shops, community centres, doctors and transport. Units were often located on busy roads. Those Seniors interviewed reported driving well into their 80's to retain their independence. Due to driving and the location of units on busy roads, Seniors reported that they were often scared to drive onto the road. People on main roads also reported a general feeling of being unsafe. It was suggested that the higher density units should be built on the street behind shops so that people are still within walking distance, but would feel safer.

6.4 Universal Access

When people's health was deteriorating, stairs were viewed as the main reason why they moved out of their homes. Often the move was recommended by their doctors. Consequently, Universal Access and changing the Building Codes of Australia was widely seen as a very positive move. Universal access meant that people, whether in private or rental houses, could remain in their houses for longer without the extra costs of retrofitting.

It was noted at one focus group that Homeswest, while housing the person close to services, had not considered that the house was at the bottom of a hill and the services were up the top. Due to lack of mobility, this person could not make it up the hill. Hence this person's ability to access services had been impeded.

6.5 Transitional Housing

Over 55's housing was discussed in some detail. As people are living longer they will be living in the complexes for, potentially, many years. The benefit from this housing would be gained only if the well aged lived on the same site as the frail aged. People would, therefore, be able to age in place. As men are living longer, the need to cater for couples will increase. Transitional housing would allow couples who had differing health needs to remain on the same site and within walking distance of each other. The fear was that if frail aged accommodation were in different suburbs from Independent Living facilities then couples and friends would be separated and quality of life would decline.

The transitional housing model described above should become a housing standard to be adhered to by all providers of Seniors' housing.

6.6 Support Services

A key support service for Seniors was the Community Centre. Community Centres, were perceived as places where information could be accessed, friends could be met and learning opportunities were provided. The Community Centres should be central, located on transport routes and within walking distance of other services such as shops. Councils should provide transport for the isolated and disabled so that they can access this support.

6.7 Equity Loans

Equity loans for financing housing or lifestyle choices were not considered, by the majority of Seniors, to be a feasible option. While maintenance was seen as an issue, people did not consider it to be an insurmountable problem. They were happy with the level of support services in the community for Seniors and the charges for maintenance. As discussed above numbers of Seniors did not want to get a home equity loan and preferred selling the house and either renting or down sizing to fund their retirement.

6.8 Park Home Owners

Park Home ownership was considered by residents to be an affordable housing alternative. However, Park Home Ownership is not considered by the *Housing*

Strategy WA (Draft). At the focus group, Park Home Owners reported that Residential Parks are closing particularly in areas of prime real estate such as seaside locations.

Residents felt that park home ownership should be promoted as a viable housing alternative. To facilitate this, the State Government should introduce, through the R-Codes and Council Town Planning Schemes, requirements for residential parks to be retained in order to give security to residents and slow the rate of closures.

To facilitate the above, financial incentives to operate residential parks should be provided. An alternative would be for the State Government, or Local Government, to own and operate parks themselves.

For comments regarding Indigenous Seniors, please refer to Indigenous Housing Section.

Recommendations:

- **Development and implementation of Affordable Housing Strategies to be enable Local Councils to be proactive and provide affordable housing and associated support services.**
- **That the implementation of Strategies regarding Seniors Housing should be a high priority for Government.**
- **Review the R-Codes to address the requirement of higher density and access to services to ensure that Seniors feel safe.**
- **Implementation of Universal Access in the Building Codes of Australia and Local Housing Strategies.**
- **Locate accommodation for the well aged and the frail aged on the same location in accordance with the principles of aging in place.**
- **Increase the range of services discussed in Strategy 5.10 to include access to Community Centres and access to supported transport.**
- **That Park Home Ownership be recognised as a viable affordable housing alternative in the *Housing Strategy WA (Draft)*.**
- **That Park Home Owners be given greater security of tenure through the following; requiring the retention of residential parks through the R-Codes and Town Planning Schemes; developing financial incentives for people to operate residential parks; that State and Local governments form a partnership to own and operate Residential Parks.**

7. Youth (15-24 year olds)

Shelter WA conducted consultation on youth issues as its contribution to the Issues Papers series that form the WA Housing Strategy. The resulting paper concluded the following key points.⁷

The report found that lack of affordable housing for youth was an issue that was increasing. While the costs of rentals was increasing the income for youth, both male and female, was declining in real terms. Further, the declining availability of affordable housing and limited full time employment entry points were contributing to barriers to housing for youth.

Other identified barriers included discrimination by landlords due to lack of references, low income, and the perception of an inability to manage a house. Lack of appropriate housing contributed to, and was an effect of, a complex lifestyle affected by substance abuse, mental health issues and Indigenous cultural issues.

As mentioned elsewhere in this document, tax concessions for private investors who contribute to meeting the demand should be considered. The Mandurah forum also recommended that housing and employment strategies, particularly the creation of apprenticeships, should be linked.

The paper proposed that given declining Commonwealth rental subsidies and affordability, that a package of housing and support services should be considered. The package would include innovative means of housing and supporting youth into private housing, whether rental or purchase. Those packages discussed included the YES and FRESH programs. An initiative mentioned in the Strategy is the Foyer Model. While these programs have many merits Shelter WA's position is that it is important to house and support young people. The proposed review of programs and lack of implementation of housing programs does not meet this objective.

Further, public housing needs to increase its role in meeting the needs of youth. Capital expenditure on diverse housing stock needs to occur to ensure that their needs are met.

Recommendations:

- **Development of tax incentives for developers to diversify housing stock and meet needs of those at risk.**
- **Develop innovative means of housing and supporting youth as a transition into private housing.**
- **Homeswest increase expenditure on diverse housing stock to meet demand.**
- **Increase funding for YES and FRESH, and similar programs.**
- **Link housing and employment strategies.**

⁷ Department of Housing and Works & Shelter WA, 2003, *Housing Strategy WA; Issues Paper*, Government of Western Australia, Perth.

8. Crisis Housing

8.1 Overview

Crisis Housing has to cater for many diverse needs. Men, women, families, refugees, Indigenous people, youth, and mental health consumers are amongst the diverse people that utilise the services. The Crisis accommodation centres are, reportedly, under a great deal of stress. They are at capacity and cannot meet demand. It was reported at the joint Shelter WA/WACOSS forum one reason for the level of stress was that no new refuges had been built in 14 years. Those who are in crisis housing have no exit points and cannot move onto medium to long term housing. Lack of suitable, affordable, accommodation was, therefore an issue.

Of further concern to Indigenous and non-Indigenous women was the age limit for teenage boys going into refuges. Women were apprehensive that boys would have to go to the men's refuges and that this was unsuitable and unsafe for them. If the father was violent and in the men's hostel a mother did not feel able to protect her child.

An issue brought up in several forums was the need for medium term accommodation while people are waiting for priority public housing. As suggested in various forums, the supply of medium term accommodation needs to be addressed in conjunction with the provision of crisis accommodation. The aim is twofold; to provide exit points from crisis housing; to fill the gap while women, particularly those who are escaping domestic violence, are waiting for Homeswest accommodation.

In addition the system does not cater well for people who are homeless. An instance was cited where a woman became homeless and had to live in her car for eight months while waiting for priority housing from Homeswest. As she had become homeless, she was difficult to contact when housing did become available. She felt that to receive housing you had to have a house. Again her example showed the importance of housing in providing stability and safety for people at risk. Inability to maintain communication with Homeswest was cited a number of times by people who had been homeless.

Following on from the above, the comment was made that support workers need to remind clients of the importance of keeping in contact so that contact becomes a habit. This is of significance due to relatively long periods, up to five years, of waiting for housing from Homeswest. However, it was felt that a contributing problem for people at risk was the sense of false hope given to them that a house would be forthcoming and soon. People lose hope and do not keep in touch.

To facilitate housing there needs to be a partnership then between refuges and Homeswest. The aim would be to maximise organisational capacity to provide support and increase communication with those at risk. This will create a safe environment for people to keep in touch and obtain housing. The benefit of this relationship will be to facilitate the creation of exit points from crisis housing. Homeswest would have the ability to respond to changes in demand for crisis housing over time.

The capacity of Homeswest to respond to the level of demand was discussed at length at the joint Shelter WA/WACOSS forum. It was felt that the waiting time for Homeswest priority housing of 6-8 months was too long. Consequently, participants saw a need to increase the building and provision of Homeswest priority housing. In

addition the review of crisis accommodation proposed in the Strategy would need adequate goals and a timeline of implementation.

Finally, a consistent call at forums was to increase the funding of the Homeless Helpline.

8.2 Women

Consideration, and greater consultation regarding, the housing needs of street workers needs to be undertaken. An ex-street worker emphasised that medium term accommodation was necessary for women. However, often the rules of the house did not suit street workers. For example, curfews did not allow women the ability to come home late and be safe. Hence, the incidence of homelessness and being at risk increases. Some young girls take up offers of housing from clients but are often abused as a result. Consequently, there is a high degree of secondary homelessness occurring with girls often staying on the couches of friends.

Some housing options for street workers were discussed. Shared accommodation is often not an option as drug and alcohol dependent people can often end up living permanently in the accommodation. This will, inevitably put the tenancy, and security, at risk. Community housing was discussed at some length but the success of community housing depended upon the skill and motivation of the support worker. The person interviewed had been involved in one community housing project but it had failed.

As discussed above notifying homeless people that housing is available, is an issue. Where people are at risk and have unstable living arrangements, it was suggested that the length of notification should be up to two weeks. One person had only received three days notice.

8.3 Men

Crisis accommodation for men with children was identified by both Indigenous people and Refugees as a gap in services.

In regional areas the provision of crisis accommodation was seen as necessary. Albany was cited as a regional centre where crisis accommodation services were closing. Men who are at risk as a result are prisoners on release, men discharged from hospital, those subject to restraining orders and having to leave home. With respect to prisoners on release it was felt that Police had to play a role in ensuring that men were able to access appropriate accommodation.

For further discussions on crisis accommodation for Indigenous people and Youth, refer to the specific sections of the report.

It has been reported that upon separating men are in need of various support services. Initially upon separating, men are often sleeping on the couches of friends or family. Men can find themselves in accommodation that is unsuitable for their children and as a consequence, access to children becomes problematic and may not be easily resolved. It was suggested at the joint Shelter WA/Men's Advisory Network (MAN) forum that a short term residential facility, with common recreational areas, suitable for children may be a solution.

While they are setting up the second home for their children, men incur costs of finding suitable accommodation, bond payments and purchasing white goods and furniture. Several suggestions were forth coming at the joint Shelter WAMAN forum. These included the establishment of a once off crisis payment from Centrelink to men upon separation; a one third moratorium on the payment of child support for three months while a second home is established; No Interest Loan Scheme, or grant, to assist with the purchasing of white goods..

Further, it was proposed that consideration needs to be given to rental support to men to cater for their children are renting larger houses. Due to the lack of affordable accommodation, it was felt that rental subsidies are necessary to ensure that the needs of the children and the father are met. For example, it was proposed that Commonwealth Rental Assistance be increased. This could be achieved by raising the income ceiling to cater for men who need two bedroom housing for their children. It was also suggested that Homeswest should provide men, on lower incomes, with larger housing to cater for the children.

A proposition designed to meet a variety of needs was the implementation of a Family Program. It was suggested that various agencies such as DCD, Department of Justice and DHW, were appropriate, work collaboratively to support men, and their children, to find suitable accommodation and work through any issues they may have.

Recommendations:

- **Build a variety of crisis accommodation in regional and metropolitan areas, that is located close to support services and transport, that meet growing and diverse needs of people including, men, women, refugees, men or women with families, Indigenous people and youth.**
- **Adequately fund new and existing crisis accommodation for the provision of services and with appropriate levels of staffing and management.**
- **Alignment of crisis housing exit points with Homeswest priority housing and an Affordable Housing Strategy.**
- **Facilitate the transition to housing by developing and strengthening relationships between Homeswest and Refuges.**
- **Increase the funding of the Homeless Helpline and Mensline.**
- **Undertake further research in conjunction with Street worker support services into addressing the housing needs of street workers.**
- **Development of medium term accommodation designed to meet a variety of needs.**
- **Recognition of the impact of divorce and secondary homelessness upon men.**
- **Investigate methods to support people in the transition after separation to find appropriate accommodation and any associated issues**
- **Investigate methods of financially supporting men in setting up a second home.**
- **Investigate the role and powers of police to ensure that men upon release from prison are able to access appropriate accommodation.**
- **Develop a timeline for the proposed review in Strategy 5.9 to be completed and recommendations to be implemented**

9. Community Housing Sector

Concern was expressed at the forum hosted at the Multicultural Services Units that the reform of the Community Housing Sector would limit sources of income for housing providers. Without the income from housing the capacity for organisations to provide support services would be limited. It was acknowledged by participants that some reform was necessary. However, the full implications of reform proposals required further analysis.

Participants proposed that the number of Community Housing organisations could be reduced to between 50 and 80. This would allow for creating efficiencies without losing the diversity and strengths of the sector. Key stakeholders suggested that further discussions on reform would be welcome.

Recommendation;

- **That implementation of Community Housing sector reforms be subject to further consultation with the various stakeholders with the aim of finding a suitable number of housing organisations that both maximises the strengths of the sector and minimises inefficiencies.**

10. Boarding and Lodging Houses

10.1 Overview

Boarding and lodging houses meet the needs of those on very low incomes, particularly single men, people with disabilities and mental health consumers. In general those consulted with for this project did not feel that Boarding Houses were adequately maintained, needed improved management and required stronger consumer protection through legislation. Where there was inadequate management, people reported feeling unsafe and threatened. This was exacerbated when males and females were located in the same building.

For a comprehensive response on Boarding and Lodging Houses, in relation to the *Housing Strategy WA (Draft)*, refer to the separate submission prepared as part of the 'Where will they live?' Campaign.⁸ However, as the issues regarding Boarding and Lodging Houses were repeatedly raised in the consultations a brief discussion is needed here.

10.2 Mental Health Consumers

The main issues for those consulted revolved around the provision of affordable housing that was close to services. A number of suggestions were made by mental health consumers to meet their needs.

Boarding and lodging houses were seen to be a key component in the housing stock for Mental Health Consumers. Not only were they affordable but also a level of service provided that supported people and helped them retain their independence. They also provided a sense of community. However, people are greatly concerned by the diminishing number of boarding houses, particularly the proposed closure of Ocean View Lodge. Participants felt that more boarding and lodging houses should be opened and that the standard of boarding houses should be increased. If the lack of boarding houses was not addressed people felt that more people would become homeless.

It was suggested that empty office building could be converted into lodging houses or affordable one bedroom apartments. As the infrastructure was already in place and given that office space was in central locations, they would be ideal. This process would add to increasing the diversity of housing stock in affluent areas.

To facilitate the above suggestions and increase the level of service provided to tenants of boarding houses or unit developments, the proposal was that smaller boarding houses should share the cost of a mental health support worker. Larger boarding houses should have 24hour mental health support workers and a first aid post.

To encourage private developers to move into this market, the idea of providing tax incentives was put forward. The argument was put that the choice for government was between paying for increasing numbers of mental health consumers being homeless, suffering declining health, being arrested by police and ending up in

⁸ Community Housing Coalition of WA, Equal Opportunity Commission, Northern Suburbs Legal Centre, St Patrick's, St Vincent de Paul, Shelter WA, Tenants Advice Service, Western Australian Association for Mental Health 2006, *Response to the Department of Housing and Works Housing Strategy WA Draft Discussion Paper from the 'Where will they Live?' Campaign stakeholders*, Perth.

prison. Tax incentives would, it was argued, be cheaper than paying for police time and using prison resources.

Concurrent with increasing the provision of affordable housing, the government should legislate to increase the standards of boarding houses. Participants were concerned that it was no use having boarding and lodging houses if these did not provide accommodation of an appropriate standard. Many private boarding and lodging houses, particularly those catering for mental health consumers, were in poor condition and/or poorly managed.

It was acknowledged by the focus group that there would be some community resistance to opening boarding houses. While no direct solution to this issue was discussed, they felt that community development and education were key to accepting increased diversity generally. They felt that discussions on appropriate density and diversity should promote community development and associated benefits such as the potential increase in safety.

A whole of government approach for housing and service provision for mental health consumers was seen as key to successful housing. Increasing the amount of social workers and the efficient use of libraries for disseminating information were some suggestions that were made. Further, the joint Shelter WAWACOSS forum reinforced the suggestion that a whole of government approach was necessary in identifying gaps in the provision of services and accommodation and then the development of partnerships.

Recommendations:

- **Develop a whole of government approach to housing and the provision of services for mental health consumers**
- **Develop requirements for increasing density and diversity that facilitates community development and meets the needs those at risk through Local Housing Strategies.**
- **Increase the provision of affordable housing including developing a strategy to increase the stock of Boarding and Lodging Houses. This could be achieved by converting empty office buildings; constructing purpose built facilities; providing tax incentives for the private developers.**
- **Increase support for both the owner and tenants of boarding houses by providing support workers and a first aid post.**

11. Local Government

11.1 Implementation

Local government plays a key role in the *Housing Strategy WA (Draft)*. Through its statutory planning functions, local government can provide an effective mechanism for ensuring the provision of affordable and appropriate housing that meets community needs. However, it was felt at both the joint Shelter WA/WACOSS and Mandurah forums that there was a heavy reliance upon local government to contribute to the design and implementation of Regional and Local Housing strategies without the corresponding recognition, funding, and empowerment, to undertake this process effectively.

In order to be effective in implementing the *Housing Strategy WA (Draft)*, local government needs to be recognised as a proactive partner in the strategy, and empowered by the State government to achieve the stated broad goals of the Regional Housing Strategies. While local housing strategies must meet local conditions, those at the joint Shelter WA/WACOSS and Mandurah forums agreed that if local council policies were consistent in dealing with issues, and that those policies met similar goals then this would be more effective than working in isolation.

To facilitate the implementation and empower local government, it was felt that two elements were necessary: 1) the provision of a realistic range of measurable objectives or housing targets; 2) a consistent set of guidelines for dealing with developers. In this manner local government could be united and proactive in its relationship with developers and achieve significant goals. For example, if local government was consistent and had clearly defined performance indicators it could effectively achieve affordable housing outcomes. Secondly, the guidelines are particularly necessary given, as mentioned, the pressured workplaces and the relative inexperience of planning staff as opposed to the experience, drive and financial goals of developers.

While it was acknowledged at the joint Shelter WA/WACOSS forum that many local government authorities do not view themselves as housing providers, another method of ensuring appropriate and affordable housing was to further explore the suggestion of forming public/private partnerships. Further, *Housing Strategy WA (Draft)* should develop linkages to *Network City* to give a whole of government and community vision for housing. Linkages with *Network City* would also facilitate discussion on the broad issues of sustainability, including transport as recommended by the Mandurah forum.⁹

Overall, it was felt that the dislocation of populations and lack of affordable housing could create pressure points. It was argued that the limited number of affordable locations provided diminishing housing options for people on a lower income. These communities would then become under stress and potential areas for crime. It was seen as an essential component for the success of the housing strategy that affordability be addressed. Local government should be the advocate for affordable housing in using their relationship with developers.

While not discussed at other forums, it can be extrapolated from the above comments that further consideration of Strategy 1.3 is necessary. In this strategy the broad outcomes for Regional Strategies are indicated and it is stated that Regional

⁹ Anthony J. & Pendergast P. 2005, *Housing Strategy WA: Report on Mandurah Forum*, Shelter WA, Perth.

Development Commissions and Metropolitan Regional Councils could be responsible for their development. However, the Strategy 1.3 does not indicate what authority the Regional Councils and Commissions will have to achieve affordable housing outcomes. Nor does the Strategy indicate within what parameters, or criteria, they can operate. This example re-enforces the opinion that local government and the associated Regional Councils need to be empowered to work with State government and successfully achieve economic, social and sustainability goals.

11.2 Response to the Strategy

Generally it was felt that the strategy did not recognise the diversity of local government in terms of issues, size, population, income and location. Many rural, regional and smaller Councils struggle on a limited income and small rate base.

Inner urban localities reported that old housing stock that was affordable and catered for a diverse population was being demolished or renovated and was not being replaced. The new housing market was unaffordable and impacted on local populations with existing communities being displaced. People who had been living in either shared accommodation or boarding houses no longer had those options available and moved out of an area. The consequence was a loss of diversity in housing stock, with a resulting homogenisation of the demographic profile.

Outer metropolitan councils reported that the Department of Housing and Works' New Living Program was also resulting in populations being dislocated. Indigenous people were reported to be the group most affected by this issue, with people moving to regional areas that had limited support services. If an area did not have a doctor then many people did not stay and houses were left vacant. Some communities had tried to fund a doctor but had had mixed success. Those communities with services were put under pressure from growing populations. The above emphasises the need for a whole of government approach to housing.

At the various consumer focus groups, the role of local councils was discussed at great length. They were considered to be both service and housing providers. Housing provision would cater for those at risk, such as Seniors. They were also seen as community facilitators. It was suggested that as part of the strategy that the relationship between community development, density, sustainability, open space provision and affordability be researched and examples from overseas be assessed.

Recommendations:

- **Develop set of measurable and achievable goals with regards to the provision of diverse stock, affordable, appropriate housing to guide Regional and Local Housing Strategies.**
- **Investigate, in consultation with WALGA, methods of empowering Local government to achieve housing outcomes including funding and policy development.**
- **Recognise the diversity of local government.**
- **Develop a set of guidelines for dealing with developers that can be applied across the sector.**
- **Ensure that support services for communities are considered through a whole of government response to housing.**
- **Develop further links with *Network City* to ensure a common vision for housing and sustainability.**
- **Explore the link between community development, demographic change, density, sustainability, transport, open space and affordability.**

12. Conclusion

Shelter WA has made recommendations based on the experience of 284 people from a variety of housing backgrounds in 7 forums and 15 focus groups. The extensive consultation validated the overall direction of the *Housing Strategy WA (Draft)*. However, the consultation also highlighted some major gaps and areas of concern to both housing consumers and service providers.

Implementation of the strategy requires much further consideration. It was felt that the strategy requires clearly articulated and defined goals, with performance indicators that are measurable, achievable, realistic and funded. The goals will provide housing that is accessible, equitable and affordable. It was felt that for many of the currently stated objectives and strategies to involve further reviews would not necessarily achieve housing outcomes that would benefit people in the foreseeable future.

The co-ordination of the whole of government approach could be a factor that influences the success of any strategy. Further, it was regarded that the implementation of regional and local strategies requires local government to be given support to achieve the overall objectives of the strategy. Overall the question was what will the strategy look like and how effective will it be without government being empowered to achieve the stated goals.

Housing affordability affected all those consulted with. Suggestions included a review of the current Residential Tenancies Act (WA), increasing accountability for the private industry, increasing incentives to developers and enhance and protecting the role of Homeswest were considered. Addressing affordability would provide a tool for addressing stress in various demographics including Indigenous people, refugees, seniors, youth, families and mental health consumers.

Key recommendations for the success of the strategy would be to develop, implement and appropriately fund a Public Housing Strategy, an Indigenous Housing Strategy and a Boarding and Lodging House Strategy. Each of these proposed strategies will have action plans and review mechanisms in place. Areas for further consideration include minimising the impact of discrimination in housing, the review of the New Living program and Good Neighbour Policy, and minimising barriers to home ownership.

The proposed changes will have substantial implications on the Strategy. Therefore, Shelter WA recommends that when the issues regarding implementation and funding have been addressed that the *Housing Strategy WA (Draft)* is re-advertised for further comment.