



newsletter

EDITORIAL:

SEPTEMBER 2008

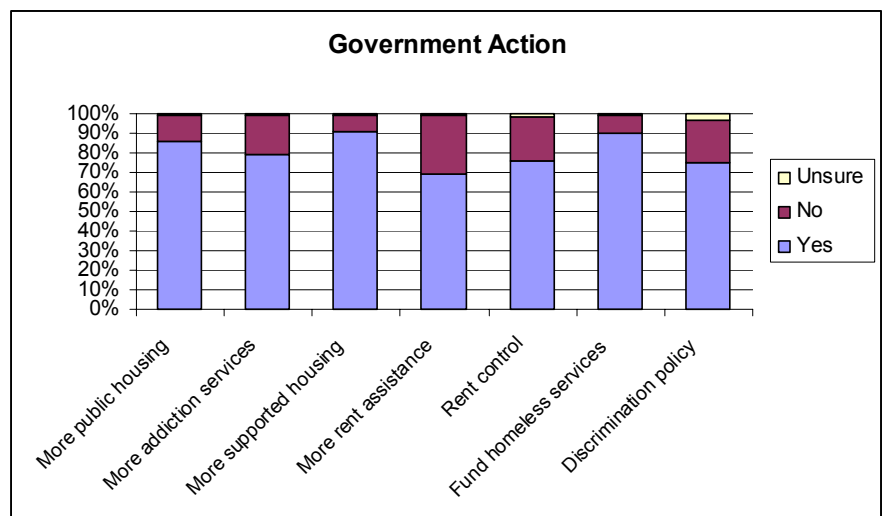
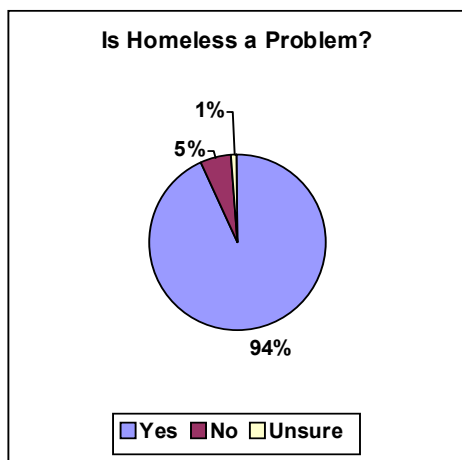
WILL THE NEW GOVERNMENT SUPPORT SOCIAL HOUSING?

RESULTS FROM THE HOMELESS PERSONS WEEK STREET SURVEY: WA PEOPLE GIVE THEIR OPINION ABOUT, EXPERIENCE OF & SUGGESTIONS TO GOVERNMENT ON WA'S HOMELESSNESS

The report of the street survey conducted during Homeless Persons Week (4-8 August 2008) is near completion. A total of 91 persons were surveyed and the results show overwhelming support for government intervention to address the issue of homelessness. The key findings of this survey are:

- Over 90% of people believed homelessness to be a problem in Western Australia.**
85 of the 91 respondents (94%) believe homelessness is a problem in WA and 22% (19 respondents) of these respondents though it was *extremely* bad. (See the chart below)
- Over 90% of people surveyed supported one or more of the Creating Room in the Boom (CRiB) Campaign's 7 recommendations for government action.**
88 of the 91 respondents (97%) *believed the government should do something* to address the issue of homelessness. The CRiB Campaign objectives all received high acceptance: the objective which was supported the most was to 'provide more supported housing for people with mental health problems and other disabilities' (91%) while to 'give more rent assistance to people on Centrelink so they can afford to pay the rent' attracted the least support (69%). (See the graph below).
- Homelessness had been experienced by a significant proportion of the general population in Perth.**
14% (13 respondents) experienced homelessness currently or previously, while 35% (32 respondents) reported that they knew someone who experienced homelessness either currently or previously.

The full report is to be published on Shelter WA's website in October, or come to the AGM on 30th October for the presentation



Elsewhere in this Issue

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HUNG & HANGING ON HOPEFUL

With WA's government now finally decided after a harrowing 10 days of hard negotiation between the State National Party and the leaders of the WA Labor and Liberal parties, we can all finally breathe some relief that a government is determined. WA maintains it's convention of either going against the trend or being a trend setter whichever way you look at it.

Shelter WA, continuously funded since 1979, has experienced a number of changes in our state government, usually with minimal impact on our operation. Shelter WA is pleased to be valued for independence and a non-partisan approach to advocating for low income and otherwise disadvantaged housing consumers.

Sadly, over the past 15 years, neither party, when in a position to do so, has made the level of funding commitment to public and social housing that delivers a housing safety net providing the foundation for social inclusion required by many people on low incomes and otherwise disadvantaged, to achieve and participate their full potential contribution in society.

With the Hon. Mr Grylls successful in gaining commitment for significant redirection of funds to regional areas and the Hon. Mr Barnett on record for his commitment to assist people with mental illness and people with disabilities, Shelter WA hopes that this translates to the provision of an adequate supply of affordable rental housing, including public and community housing, both with supports and independent, in the regions and town centres to meet the need and lessen the impact of escalating costs of living for those on low and fixed incomes least able to access suitable housing in the current market. Shelter WA welcomes the new state government and looks forward to an opportunity to discuss social housing needs for low income consumers.

INDEPENDENT PEAK BODIES THROUGH A WESTMINSTER LOOKING GLASS

The Westminster system of government is the foundation for most western democratic political systems. Around the world, Westminster systems of government observe several core elements including the separation of three key political powers. These powers are; the executive power to make laws (the legislature parliament of democratically elected members of the government as a Ministry with an arm of review being the Senate), the power to interpret laws (the judiciary and the courts - informed by the 'rule of law') and the power to

enforce laws (an impartial public service including police and statutory agencies and the 'Crown' an independent non-partisan monarch representative).

This separation of powers is intended to introduce 'checks and balances' and avoid any one arm of government holding total power and also to reduce the potential of political leaders, court judges or law enforcers to exercise undue influence.

In Australia Westminster style government is characterised by two houses of parliament, the Senate (Legislative Council) and the House of Representatives (Legislative Assembly). Forming Australian laws and policy decisions are often subject to lobbying and representation by interested parties, seeking to voice their concerns and suggestions to those in power. Peak bodies act to unify, consult and represent the interests of their stakeholders. It is important that Peak bodies are engaged in political and social issues and communicate effectively with their membership, and that vested interests and conflicts of interest, when identified, are acknowledged and ameliorated.

The strongest role of Peak bodies is often to represent and support 'the little guy', those small agencies that lack resources and capacity to undertake research, develop and implement strategic plans and through lack of size struggle to influence policy when acting in isolation. Many small agencies delivering community services are closely engaged with their service users, they are arguably more likely to be flexible and responsive in providing personalised supports and operate with less bureaucracy and administration. Larger organisations, by necessity, often become less individualised and more rigid in their application of policy and procedures.

It is a central role of Peak bodies to speak and act on behalf of all members and to represent and advocate equally, fairly and impartially, providing the same level of service to large and small members, bringing cohesion, a collective voice and representation for those agencies unable to negotiate directly.

Peak bodies are vulnerable to political pressures both from within their membership and externally, and in extreme cases peaks have been silenced through the withdrawal of funding during times of discontent. National Shelter was defunded by the Howard Government as one of the first decisions it took on gaining power and we have seen a consistent demise in public and community housing since this important national consumer peak was shut down.

A Peak may challenge or criticise government decisions and policies, and it is during these times that Peaks most need support from their membership and stakeholders. Much like a union, gaining standard working conditions and uniform fair wages and salaries, peak bodies give sector support and evidence based policy analysis to their members and balance the difficult process of competitive tendering and the 'dog-eat-dog' environment of accessing government funding and performing responsible service delivery.

Peak bodies are only as strong as their membership, and can only represent issues that are brought to their attention. I encourage you to maintain your membership in your peak body and if you are not a member become one! When the only voices decision makers hear are those with size, money and power, all consumers suffer, as is evidenced by the decline in public housing since the withdrawal of funding to National Shelter and a vacuum where the voice of disadvantaged housing consumers used to be.

THE NATIONAL RENTAL AFFORDABILITY SCHEME

The Australian Government has established the NRAS Scheme to stimulate the supply of up to 50,000 new affordable rental dwellings. This scheme provides financial incentives of a minimum of \$8,000 per year in Australian and State and Territory government support and is aimed delivering affordable rental housing to low-income working households and others on low to moderate incomes.

The NRAS is aimed at encouraging financial institutions such as banks, superannuation funds, credit unions and property trusts. These institutions may partner with a tenancy management service such as a community housing provider or not-for-profit organisation to build and manage housing provided for the target group.

The Establishment Phase opened on the 24th July and closed on September 4th, with the Round 2 opening on 25th October and closing on 12th January 2009. For more details on the NRAS scheme including the contact numbers for MacroPlan the organisation responsible for facilitating partnerships between investors and property managers. See the FHACSA website:

<http://www.facsia.gov.au/internet/facsinternet.nsf/housing/nras.htm>

THE NATIONAL AFFORDABLE HOUSING AGREEMENT

State and Territory governments are now moving to the final stages of detailing and costing the National Affordable Housing Agreement (NAHA) that will

replace the Commonwealth State Housing Agreement (CSHA) and will be implemented on January 1 2009.

The CSHA has provided the framework for funding public housing since 1945, and when it commenced it stimulated significant residential building and development, responding to the need for a rapid increase in the supply of affordable housing for returning soldiers and their families, as well as many other households. Over the first 3 decades of the CSHA, eligibility to rent public housing was comparatively open, and there was little or no stigma associated with living in 'State Housing', indeed, it seemed entire suburbs were created with government funded houses and lived in by everyone.

Now public housing is targeted to those most in need, people with limited access to the mainstream housing market, and public housing has gradually become residualised, welfare oriented and unviable.

The rent-to-income ratio of 25%, when the tenant household income is a Centrelink benefit does not deliver adequate returns to maintain and grow public housing supply, and with a simultaneous reduction in the amount of commonwealth funding to the states and territories for public housing construction we have seen the slow decline in the proportion of stock around the nation.

Not only do we hope that the NAHA will address this reduction in our most fundamental social safety net, by delivering the \$3.5B additional money in the next budget that has been stripped from the system, but we call on our leaders to inform their thinking with the evidence of need as highlighted by public housing waiting lists across the country and the experience of crisis accommodation providers and homeless service agencies who uniformly report that their most requested assistance is for affordable housing.

National Shelter, together with ACOSS, the Community Housing Federation of Australia and Homelessness Australia urge all interested people to send a letter to their Federal Member of Parliament to encourage commitment to increasing the supply of public and community housing to meet the needs of our communities.

COAG deliberations in early October, with the final details determined at the December meeting give a tight window to remind our governments what people want and need.

Shelter NSW has developed a form letter, download, insert your details, print and post or fax to your local member. This letter is for NSW residents and may need minor adjustment to

reflect WA circumstances. Follow this link for the letter:

<http://www.shelternsw.infoexchange.net.au/docs/fly08nahafederalmpletter-proforma.rtf>

NATIONAL HOUSING DAY OF ACTION - 24th SEPTEMBER 2008

Arrangements have been underway with ACOSS, Homelessness Australia, the Community Housing Federation and National Shelter for a National Housing Advocacy Day on 24 September.

These tenacious folk gathered on Parliament House in Canberra and had confirmed and tentative appointments with many MPs and Senators to urge their support for a significant increase in funding to public and community housing through the yet to be detailed NAHA. There is confirmation that the Minister for Housing and the Shadow Minister for Housing will be speaking in the morning.

On behalf of all low-income and otherwise disadvantaged housing consumers struggling to secure affordable appropriate housing in WA, go forth fellow brave hearts, make our hopes a reality, speak the truth and urge our politicians to support low-income and affordable housing.



Professor Julian Disney and Bronwyn Kitching in Fitzroy Vic in August

AUSTRALASIAN HOUSING INSTITUTE ABORIGINAL MAORI AND TORRES STRAIT ISLANDER WORKING GROUP

Shelter WA recently took part in a half-day workshop followed by a half-day consultation forum on Maori Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander

Housing facilitated and hosted by the Australasian Housing Institute.

These events were stimulating and informative and included presentations from Tom Slockee the Chairman of the NSW Aboriginal Housing Office, and an early leader in supporting Aboriginal Community Housing strong governance, quality improvement, financial viability and participation with Aboriginal people. Tom maintains his role as Chair of the South Eastern Aboriginal Regional Management Service (SEARMS). Aboriginal Housing Victoria was represented by Sharon Paten, Toni Vine-Bromley from Shelter NT gave a sound overview of the indigenous housing issues in the Territory and John Chacko from North Queensland Regional Indigenous Housing discussed the need for housing management to be based on sound business and management principles, avoiding duplication, sharing and consolidating management arrangements where economies of scale can significantly decrease administrative costs.

Shelter WA is keen to consult and support WA indigenous people to achieve safe secure, appropriate and affordable housing that supports social, health, education and employment opportunities and will be seeking ways to ensure the needs of aboriginal people in housing can be heard. Watch this space, or contact us if you are interested in contributing your perspective.

CREATING ROOM IN THE BOOM AND THE SOUNDS OF SILENCE

The Creating Room in the Boom campaign group was getting active when the Olympics and the Election intercepted and attention shifted. Peak representatives had made contact with the then government Ministers and other parties, but prior to these appointments, WA went into caretaker mode and then into limbo and now to a new government. All of the CRiB recommendations remain as valid and urgent as ever they were and we urge our new Ministers and Treasurer to take the needs of the community seriously and show their commitment to a strong foundation for people who may experience barriers in the private rental market by delivering the increases in social housing funding we so clearly need. For the CRiB documents and background see the Tenants Advice Service website: www.taswa.org

COUNTING THE HOMELESS CENSUS 2006

The most comprehensive overview of homelessness in Australia is contained in Chris Chamberlain and David MacKenzie's 'Counting the Homeless 2006'. The analysis reveals that on census night 2006 (August 8) there were 104,676 homeless people in

Australia. Western Australia was overrepresented, accounting for almost 13% [13,391] of the nation's homeless people but less than 11% of its population [ABS cat no 3101.0; 2008]

The Counting the Homeless 2006 Report reveals that WA, along with SA, Tasmania and the ACT have experienced both an increase in the number of people homeless and also an increase in the rate per 10,000 people in the population who were experiencing homelessness, with WA increasing from an average state-wide of 64 people homeless per 10,000 in 2001 to 68.4 people homeless per 10,000.

For WA homeless service providers this comes as no surprise. WA governments have not added to the stock of emergency and crisis accommodation, WA has lost private boarding houses and lodging houses as they are increasingly unattractive as a viable business and has seen a reduction in the number of caravan parks.

Whilst the southern states report up to 28% of homeless people in Boarding houses, up to 39% in SAAP accommodation, up to 50% of people staying with friends and relatives and as low as 6% in improvised dwellings, in WA only 12% were in boarding houses, 11% in SAAP, 59% staying with friends and relatives and 18% living in improvised dwellings. Shelter WA calls for a doubling in the number of new WA public and social housing construction and purchase through the Department of Housing and Works and calls on the Minister to negotiate for increased Commonwealth funding through the COAG NAHA negotiations to facilitate this outcome. See the ABS website for Counting the Homeless details and to access a copy of the report: [http://www.ausstats.abs.gov.au/Ausstats/subscribe.r.nsf/0/57393A13387C425DCA2574B900162DF0/\\$File/20500-2008Reissue.pdf](http://www.ausstats.abs.gov.au/Ausstats/subscribe.r.nsf/0/57393A13387C425DCA2574B900162DF0/$File/20500-2008Reissue.pdf)

SHELTER WA AGM 30 OCTOBER

As has been the convention for many years, Shelter WA and the Tenants Advice Service of WA will together hold their Annual General Meetings in the same venue, back-to-back on Thursday October 30th in the afternoon between 4 - 6 pm.

This past financial year has been a challenging and eventful year for Shelter WA with staff changes, a new look website, an increase in the amount of representation and information dissemination, with the Executive Officer gaining regular media coverage and giving presentations to many groups and individuals. This year we have also seen the change in Federal government heralding major reform in all areas of commonwealth government funding and significantly increasing the amount of work for Shelter WA responding to requests for

comment and opportunities for consultation and submission. Shelter WA has embraced as many of these invitations for input as has our human resource capacity allowed. The call for input into the Select Senate Committee on Housing Affordability in March and to the Green Paper 'Which way home?' in May being two of the projects that consumed the energies of staff. On the home front Shelter WA provided input to the Equal Opportunity Commissions' investigation into discrimination in the private rental market and worked with CaLD and migrant support agencies to facilitate contribution to the inquiry by people from non-English speaking backgrounds, refugees and humanitarian entrants.

The AGM's will be made more interesting with the inclusion of a presentation from Keiko Miyazaki, a Curtin University of Technology Bachelor of Social Work student who has undertaken her practicum with Shelter WA and has been collating and analysing the information from our Street Survey conducted during Homeless Persons Week in August (see front page of this newsletter for preliminary data).

Shelter WA is always pleased to welcome new members and new Management Committee members. If you have not already done so - **renew your membership, mark your diary**, look out for the invitation to our AGM and nominate for a committee position if you are interested.

Upcoming Events

Shelter is looking forward to

- The **Reclaim the Night Rally 30th October**
Call Lianda on 0411 066 595
- The **Youth Affairs Council Fairground Conference 9-10 October** register now at: <http://www.yacwa.org.au/fairground/>
- **Mental Health Week** October 5-11 run by the WA Association for Mental Health <http://www.waamh.org.au/mentalHealthWeek.cfm>
- Supporting the **new group program** run with the Salvation Army and ARAFMI for **Adult Children of Parents with a Mental Illness (ACOMPI)** starting on the 15th October please contact David Hilton on 9427 7100 or email: david@arafmi.asn.au for details
- Seeing the **White Paper** response to the 'Which Way Home' Green Paper expected in early October
- Responding to the call for submissions regarding the **National Rental Affordability Scheme** by 24th October. Follow this link for more details: [National Rental Affordability Scheme Bill 2008](#)



Above left to right at dinner after a marathon National Shelter meeting and AGM and - National Shelter members Gary Wilson (SA) his wife Trish, Toni Vine-Bromley (NT), Deb Pippin - Tenants Union, Mary Perkins (NSW) and NSW MC member, Eddie Bourke - Community Housing Federation, Patti Chugg (Tas), Adrian Pisarski (Qld) and Shelter Qld Chair Wynn Hopkins, Bronwyn Kitching (WA) and Simon Smith - Homelessness Australia.



Above: At a National Affordable Housing Agreement Forum held in Victoria at the Fitzroy town hall on the 28th August: left to right: Professor Julian Disney, Adrian Pisarski, Deb Tsobaris Council to Homeless Persons, Gary Wilson, Simon Smith, Deb Pippin and Patti Chugg

Shelter WA

Shelter WA is Western Australia's independent peak housing organisation. Shelter represents the views of consumers and community groups on major housing issues.

Shelter WA aims to ensure that every person has access to affordable, appropriate, secure and safe housing that is free from discrimination.

We do this through:

- coordinating and representing community sector views to government;
- developing and responding to policy;
- providing education and information; and
- promoting alternative housing models.

Newsletter Production

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