

Mr Shane Edmonds  
Review (Housing Service Delivery)  
Department of Housing and Works  
Locked Bag 22  
EAST PERTH WA 6892



13 April 2007

Dear Mr Edmonds

**Re: WACOSS Brief Submission to  
Department of Housing and Works  
Review of Housing Service Delivery Discussion Paper**

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Thank you for the opportunity to provide a submission on the Department of Housing and Works Review of Housing Service Delivery Discussion Paper.

While we were able to participate in one of the think tanks leading to its development, due to the brief period of time allotted for a response to this paper we were unable to consult widely with the non-government community services sector to develop a response to the questions raised. However, we would like to provide a brief submission highlighting those policy issues WACOSS has previously identified.

### **About WACOSS**

The Western Australian Council of Social Service Incorporated (WACOSS) is the peak body of the community service sector across Western Australia. Since 1956, WACOSS has been developing and strengthening the non-government community services sector's capacity to assist all Western Australians. With over 350 members, WACOSS has strong relationships with the social services sector and seeks to represent their interests, and those of the disadvantaged individuals and families they assist at a service level. Given this relationship, WACOSS is in a unique position to comment on issues in our society that socially impact upon disadvantaged members of the community.

### **Housing Policy**

A crisis in housing affordability in Western Australia has focussed a spotlight on the need for State Government action. The crisis, which has long affected vulnerable groups and people on low incomes, has now worsened to impact all first home buyers and renters.<sup>1</sup> Part of the solution to this crisis is a long overdue increase in public housing stock. In addition, innovations are needed to assist low income people into private tenancies and home purchases. Also, more State-supported accommodation is needed for people in crisis or needing support in the short or long term. Solving our housing affordability crisis requires an integrated approach.

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<sup>1</sup> Shelter WA. *Submission to the Review of the First Home Owner Grant Act 2000* Karel Eringa February 2006

Housing is a basic human need. It plays a crucial role in determining whether or not people live in poverty and in a society's ability to realise broader social outcomes. It affects people's ability to participate in employment, education and training, as well as the social life of the community and to maintain good health and well-being.

In Western Australia, the amount of well located, affordable housing available for people on low incomes, including the working poor, is decreasing rapidly. The consequences of this are far reaching. In most countries, housing is a key indicator of social exclusion. Housing access and affordability is acutely linked to employment opportunities<sup>2</sup>.

State Government policies and processes influence availability, affordability and adequacy of shelter in many ways. It oversees an urban planning system that determines residential density, neighbourhood amenities and where housing may be located. Through state taxes and charges it provides financial incentives and disincentives for developments and private ownership. It provides infrastructure and essential services like roads, electricity and water. It regulates building standards and through a system of consumer protection it regulates tenancies and contracts. It also funds public housing and crisis accommodation for the disadvantaged and vulnerable groups.

This Government has demonstrated an active commitment to housing through such initiatives as the State Homelessness Strategy and the Housing Strategy WA. It has increased funding to SAAP services and supported effective homelessness strategies. However, there remain areas of need which have not been adequately addressed and further action is urgently needed. The Government has a responsibility to act now to address the lack of affordable housing, thereby stemming the growth of problems associated with lack of housing, particularly homelessness and social exclusion.

The economic consequences of these recent trends are worth noting. As affordable housing retreats further from centres of employment growth, commuting time and costs rise for those whose housing opportunities are constrained by low incomes. Low wage job vacancies in employment centres become harder to fill, wage premiums must be paid and labour markets function less efficiently<sup>3</sup>. WACOSS welcomes the increasing focus on opportunities to locate affordable housing in transit oriented development as outlined in the Network City Strategy.

### **Policy Priorities**

- Continue the State Homelessness Strategy initiatives and expand these programs.
- Increase funding for existing agencies already funded through the Supported Accommodation Assistance Program Five (SAAP 5) to meet the identified shortfall.
- Funding to public housing should be increased to add a total of 3,308 new dwellings per year to meet a target of 6% of all housing stock by 2015.
- Increase the amount of appropriate social, community and crisis housing available to particularly disadvantaged groups (identified below).
  - Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples
  - Children and young people
  - CaLDB Large Families
  - Women
  - People with disabilities (under the Independent Living Program)
  - People with mental illnesses
  - People released from prison
- Fund appropriate housing (i.e. group units) for young people under 18 years old with mental health problems. Funding should be provided to support residents with experienced staff and independent living skills programs.

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<sup>2</sup> ACOSS, (2003) *The Bare Necessities: Poverty and Deprivation in Australia Today* Submission to the Senate Enquiry into Poverty and Financial Hardship, ACOSS, Sydney.

<sup>3</sup> Gavin Woods (2004) 11th Annual F. Oswald Barnett Oration: 9 November 2004, What Is Happening in Australian Housing Markets? Why Policy Makers Should be Concerned. Downloaded: <http://www.sisr.net/events/docs/obo11.pdf>

- Expand and support community housing including funding training for staff and volunteers in community housing organisations.
- Increase the supply of and support existing boarding and lodging houses in WA as outlined in the *Response to the Department of Housing and Works Housing Strategy WA Draft Discussion Paper from the 'Where Will They Live' campaign stakeholders*.
- Increase the supply of affordable and appropriate accommodation in regional areas, including options for home purchasing, private rental and social housing.
- Increase the amount of social and affordable housing using a range of initiatives across State and Local Governments.
- Examine and resolve national and state government policy issues to support service providers to work in a more integrated way to address the complex needs of their clients. An essential component of a coordinated initiative is an integrated crisis response to assist people with both mental health and drug and alcohol issues with measures to prevent homelessness.

### **Summary Points regarding the Housing Service Delivery Review**

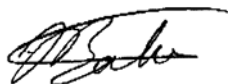
- The State Government has a responsibility to ensure that housing is available for all Western Australians.
- Much work is to be done to ensure that a diversity of stock exists to meet the basic needs of Western Australians:
  - Large families are not adequately housed.
  - Single person accommodation, in the form of boarding or lodging houses, is scarce.
  - Supported accommodation, for a range of people who are experiencing temporary difficulties, is urgently required.
  - Above all, urgent action is required to increase public housing stock for those who have been priced out of the private rental and home ownership markets.
- The important role that non-government housing service providers play in Western Australia should be supported and expanded with adequate resources. Their full participation in this review is a critical component to inform any decisions or direction setting.

We commend the Government's commitment to improve housing service delivery and reiterate the comments made most frequently by stakeholders - that reviews are not worth the paper they are written on unless action is taken. In this case urgent action is necessary.

We note that the options and directions presented as topics for consultation in the discussion paper "are not indicative of any final findings or recommendations that may result from this Review of Housing Service delivery." **WACOSS therefore seeks an opportunity to respond to the final findings and recommendations with a minimum 6-week period for consultation with the non-government housing sector.**

WACOSS welcomes future opportunities to participate in the review of the Department of Housing and Works and look forward to the release of the final paper regarding Housing Service Delivery.

Regards



**Lisa Baker**  
Executive Director  
WACOSS