



# Shelter Tasmania's

## 2013-2014 SUBMISSION TO THE STATE GOVERNMENT'S STATE BUDGET PROCESS



## Contents

ABOUT SHELTER TASMANIA .....	2
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY .....	2
SUMMARY OF RECOMMENDATIONS.....	3
<b>1. AFFORDABLE HOUSING .....</b>	<b>5</b>
1.1 Match funding for the NAHA .....	6
1.2 Land Tax and Conveyance Stamp duty .....	6
1.3 Zoning and Planning.....	7
1.4 Increasing Affordable Housing stock .....	7
<b>2. PUBLIC HOUSING.....</b>	<b>8</b>
2.1 Housing Debt.....	8
2.2 Maintenance of existing stock .....	8
2.3 Housing and Homelessness Consumer council.....	9
<b>3. COMMUNITY HOUSING .....</b>	<b>9</b>
3.1 Transfer of Title.....	10
3.2 Diversity of Stock to be transferred.....	10
3.3 Tenant Engagement Fund .....	10
3.4 Community Housing Regulations .....	11
3.5 Rates and Water bills .....	11
<b>4. PRIVATE RENTAL MARKET .....</b>	<b>11</b>
4.1 Provision of Rent and Bond assistance .....	11
4.2 Minimal Standards.....	12
4.3 Co-tenant project for older Tasmanians.....	12
<b>5. HOMELESSNESS.....</b>	<b>13</b>
5.1 Specialist Homelessness Service Brokerage dollars.....	13
5.2 Interpreting Fees.....	13
5.3 Young Homeless Tasmanians.....	14
5.4 Older Homeless Tasmanians.....	14
<b>6. MENTAL HEALTH AND HOUSING .....</b>	<b>15</b>
<b>7. MIGRANT AND REFUGEE HOUSING .....</b>	<b>16</b>
<b>8. ABORIGINAL HOUSING .....</b>	<b>17</b>

## **ABOUT SHELTER TASMANIA**

Shelter Tasmania is an independent not-for-profit housing peak organisation funded by the Department of Health and Human Services as a 'Housing Consumer and Provider Peak Body Service'. Shelter Tasmania is the key body that represents the interests of low to moderate income housing consumers and housing providers across Tasmania.

Shelter's membership consists of a wide range of organisations across Tasmania such as: tenants groups, community housing providers, homelessness and crisis accommodation services, local government, research organisations and a range of individuals and services interested in housing and homelessness issues. The Shelter Management Committee is made up of 12 elected members from across Tasmania. The Management Committee members represent a range of agencies and individuals with a broad knowledge and experience of issues facing low income housing consumers and housing providers.

Shelter Tasmania is part of a network of Shelter organisations in each State and Territory and is a member of National Shelter, Community Housing Federation Australia and Homelessness Australia.

For more information on Shelter Tasmania go to [www.shelbertas.org.au](http://www.shelbertas.org.au).

## **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

Shelter Tasmania is pleased to present this submission to the State Government's State Budget Process for 2013-2014.

Shelter welcomes and acknowledges that housing and homelessness issues have become a priority for the State government. A range of initiatives have been announced in the past financial year to assist housing for homeless people and low to moderate income earners. These include the 'Better Housing Futures' initiative, Housing Tasmania's Major Capital Development Projects and the Supported Accommodation and Assistance Review. Shelter recognises these projects as contributing to a fairer housing and homelessness system in Tasmania, however re-iterates the ongoing need for resources and consultation with services and consumers during the implementation period.

This submission is based on consultations with Shelter's members and other key stakeholders. Recommendations reflect the need for increased affordable housing options in Tasmania. It reiterates the importance of these housing options reflecting current demand and the importance of developing housing models in full consultation with consumers and delivery services. Recommendations identify ways to improve effective communication with the non-government sector, a number of significant gaps in the current service system (due to lack of services) and key pointers as to how the Tasmanian Government might continue to work toward a fairer housing system with adequate supports in place.

The submission has been endorsed by the Shelter Management Committee.

## SUMMARY OF RECOMMENDATIONS

### 1. Affordable Housing

**Recommendation 1.1:** That the State Government match any ongoing funding by the Commonwealth of the National Affordable Housing Agreement and the National Partnership Agreement on Homelessness.

**Recommendation 1.2(a):** That the State government abolish stamp duty imposed on the transfer of residential land and buildings

**Recommendation 1.2(b):** That the State government:

- Apply land tax to principle residence and shack land with low-income households made exempt; and
- Integrate land tax and local government rates, by using a joint billing arrangement and using the same valuation method.

**Recommendation 1.3:** That the State government creates an integrated housing and planning system to ensure affordable housing forms part of all substantial new housing developments.

**Recommendation 1.4(a):** That the State Government commits to a further increase of 1400 new affordable homes by 2015.

**Recommendation 1.4(b) :** That the State Government funds more single bedroom housing to be built in the South, North and the North-West of Tasmania.

### 2. Public Housing

**Recommendation 2.1:** That the State Government absorbs the housing debt across all government departments.

**Recommendation 2.2:** That the State Government allocates additional funds specifically for the maintenance of existing public housing stock.

**Recommendation 2.3:** That the State Government fund a Housing and Homelessness Consumer Council to provide advice on the implementation and integration of social housing reform.

### 3. Community Housing

**Recommendation 3.1:** Fifty per cent of the Housing Tasmania stock transferred to community housing should be transferred with full title.

**Recommendation 3.2:** Allocated stock for transfer must be varied in terms of size, location and condition.

**Recommendation 3.3:** That the State Government fund a Tenant engagement fund, which will educate and encourage tenants to transfer their tenancy from public housing to community housing properties.

**Recommendation 3.4:** That Shelter Tasmania be funded by the State Government to assist community housing providers with the soon to be implemented National Regulation of Community Housing regulatory framework.

**Recommendation 3.5:** That the State Government provide additional funds to community housing providers to cover rates and water bills for those properties to whom Housing Tasmania holds title.

#### **4. Private Rental**

**Recommendation 4.1(a):** That the State Government increase current resources in relation to the provision of rent and bond assistance to low-income Tasmanians.

**Recommendation 4.1(b):** That eligibility for bond and rent assistance be extended to cover all community housing tenants (and Special Residential Facility tenants) on low incomes with an increased budget to enable the extension.

**Recommendation 4.2:** That minimal housing standards be incorporated in the Residential Tenancy Act 1997 and that the Office of Consumer Affairs and Fair Trading is adequately funded to monitor and enforce compliance.

**Recommendation 4.3:** That the State Government fund a co-tenant service for elderly people in the private rental market.

#### **5. Homelessness**

**Recommendation 5.1:** That the Specialist Homelessness Services brokerage dollars continue to be offered and managed by Specialist Homelessness Services; and that (a) the amount is supplemented to include an amount equal to the previous 10 years indexation amounts, and (b) it receives annual indexation from now on.

**Recommendation 5.2:** That Specialist Homelessness Services are exempt from interpreting fees associated with clients accessing their services and funding is provided to cover the cost of interpreter fees.

**Recommendation 5.3(a):** That the State Government funds a supported accommodation model for young people in the North West and the South similar to Thyne House.

**Recommendation 5.3(b):** That new dollars be made available for a supported accommodation service specifically to meet the needs of teenage pregnant women and teenage mothers and their children.

**Recommendation 5.4:** That the State Government works with the Commonwealth government to have a model similar to Wintringham implemented in Tasmania.

#### **6. Mental Health and Housing**

**Recommendation 6.1:** That DHHS fund a model of alternative cluster style housing that incorporates intensive support for people with serious and complex mental health issues.

## **7. Migrant and Refugee Housing**

**Recommendation 7.1:** That the State Government funds a small cluster model of single bedroom housing specifically for migrants and refugees.

## **8. Aboriginal Housing**

**Recommendation 8.1:** That the State Government fund a culturally appropriate housing option for elderly Aboriginal people in the North.

## **9. Sustainable Resourcing of the Community Sector**

**Recommendation 9.1:** That the State Government provide adequate funding in the forward estimates to meet obligations under the Equal Remuneration Order.

**Recommendation 9.2:** That the State Government restore the agreed full formula for indexed funding of grants for DHHS-funded organisations, and the adoption of this formula for community service organisations funded by other state government department.

## **1. AFFORDABLE HOUSING**

Access to affordable housing is a key policy issue for the Tasmanian community that is only likely to grow in importance. For renters, reforms to housing assistance would improve the ability of low-income earners to afford rental housing. For purchasers, affordability is constrained by prices that remain high relative to average income levels. While high prices on rents may result from increases in housing demand, they can only be sustained at high levels when supply is not responsive. Evidence suggests that the current supply of housing is insufficient, placing ongoing pressure on house prices.<sup>i</sup>

### **1.1 Match funding for the NAHA**

**Recommendation 1.1: That the State Government match any ongoing funding by the Commonwealth of the National Affordable Housing Agreement and the National Partnership Agreement on Homelessness.**

The first and current National Affordable Housing Agreement (NAHA) provides a performance and funding framework for all levels of government to deliver improved housing affordability. The NAHA is an enduring agreement set up by COAG that replaced the Commonwealth State/Territories Housing Agreement in 2009. Under this agreement, Tasmania receives \$32 million per annum from the Commonwealth.<sup>ii</sup> The NAHA is supported by the National Partnership Agreement on Homelessness (NPAH), which expires on 1 July 2013. The Australian and Tasmanian government contributed \$32 million over 5 years to the NPAH.<sup>iii</sup>

It is important that despite Tasmania's budget constraints the State government makes provision for matching NAHA and NPAH funding. The services and housing stock that have come from these agreements are highly valued and now integrated within the community. It can be argued that unless such services have the continued investment of government the original investment will be wasted. Without ongoing government funding it will not be possible to generate the new supply needed to maintain affordable housing at current per capita levels, let alone begin to meet current shortfalls.<sup>iv</sup> Shelter Tasmania submits that the matched State government funding of the NAHA and the NPAH should be an absolute priority.

### **1.2 Land Tax and Conveyance Stamp duty**

**Recommendation 1.2(a): That the State government abolish stamp duty imposed on the transfer of residential land and buildings.**

Stamp duties suppress the number of transactions undertaken in the housing market thus reducing the effective supply of housing. By adding to the cost of moving to a larger house, stamp duty encourages people to renovate rather than re-locate. This means that more investment is channelled into making existing housing larger than into more affordable and newer housing.<sup>v</sup> Stamp duties are an unreliable source of revenue given its dependence on an active property market which, at times of economic down turn, cannot be guaranteed.<sup>vi</sup> As a turnover tax, stamp duties can also discourage the development of new housing stock as they are paid twice in the supply chain of new housing construction: when the developer buys the property from its initial owners and when the final owner buys the land. Stamp duties are also an inequitable way of taxing land and

improvements, as the tax falls on those who need to move.<sup>vii</sup> Stamp duty is a poor tax and should be abolished.

**Recommendation 1.2(b): That the State government:**

- **Apply land tax to principle residence and shack land with low-income households made exempt; and**
- **Integrate land tax and local government rates, by using a joint billing arrangement and using the same valuation method.**

Land tax is generally deemed to be an efficient tax base for the states as it is immobile and cannot move to escape tax.<sup>viii</sup> Currently in Tasmania, land tax accounts for 8.8% of Tasmania's own source taxation revenue.<sup>ix</sup> It is levied on the basis of four land categories: general; primary production; principle residence; and shack land. The last three of these categories rate of tax is currently set at zero, effectively exempting such land from tax. Therefore, of the 218,000 property holdings in Tasmania in total, land tax will be collected for only 50,000 or just under a quarter.<sup>x</sup>

Shelter Tasmania supports the findings of the Australian Futures Tax System Final Report (AFTS) that broadening the tax base to include land used for owner-occupied housing would add significant revenue raising capacity to the tax base. However, this should only include residential property owned by middle and upper income households with low-income households being exempt. Shelter also strongly believes that land tax should be levied on 'shacks' and other second homes.

### **1.3 Zoning and Planning**

**Recommendation 1.3: That the State government creates an integrated housing and planning system to ensure affordable housing forms part of all substantial new housing developments.**

Clear planning mechanisms are needed to ensure that increased housing supply is affordable for low and moderate income households. Without specific provisions for additional dwellings to target these households, there is the risk of increasing density without increasing the social and economic mix needed for the health and vitality of our communities.

Shelter is supportive of the South Australian Housing plan, which ensures that affordable housing is part of all significant new housing development with a target of 10% affordable and 5% high need housing.<sup>xi</sup> As of June 2011, more than 2,000 commitments for new affordable housing have been secured through South Australia's 15% inclusionary policy.<sup>xii</sup> Shelter recommends that a similar model be introduced in Tasmania providing it fits within the Tasmanian zoning and planning context.

### **1.4 Increasing Affordable Housing stock**

**Recommendation 1.4(a): That the State Government commits to a further increase of 1400 new affordable homes by 2015.**

Shelter Tasmania acknowledges the achievement of the current government in fulfilling the 2009 commitment of completing the construction of 1400 new homes for Tasmanians on low to moderate incomes by June 2012.<sup>xiii</sup> We challenge the government to recommit for a similar outcome in 2015.

A continued longer term funding commitment is needed to provide the sustainable base of affordable housing into the future. The Supply Council projections show that in 2008, there was an overall gap in Tasmania of 7,000 dwellings, with a further gap of 3,000 based on population projections to 2020. Whilst the 1400 new homes have made a dent in these statistics there are still several thousand Tasmanians either homeless or in housing stress.

**Recommendation 1.4(b) : That the State Government funds more single bedroom housing to be built in the South, North and the North-West of Tasmania.**

Community housing providers, mental health services, homeless services and migrant and refugee services have all identified an increased demand for 1 bedroom housing options. The Common ground apartments have increased the supply of such housing in Hobart; however there is still great need in other parts of the south, north and north-west of the State. Evidence of the mismatch between social housing stock and demand is reflected in housing type requested and high percentage of sole households in Tasmania. It is important that single bedroom housing models are mixed tenancies to keep a balance and provide for people on a variety of low to medium incomes and that the model developed is done in full consultation with potential tenants and other key stakeholders.

## **2. PUBLIC HOUSING**

Public housing tenants are generally satisfied with their accommodation and value its affordability, security of tenure and proximity to amenities. They are most satisfied when it is accessible, close to social support such as family and friends, and has adequate maintenance and modifications. Many also prefer to be located with those of a similar age and not co-located with people who have demanding behaviours.<sup>xiv</sup>

The two key issues with public housing in Tasmania are the condition of current stock and the supply of stock versus the demand. Tasmania currently has approximately 2500 people on the public housing wait list with numbers expected to increase with the introduction of a common waiting list for community and public housing and access via Housing Connect.

### **2.1 Housing Debt**

**Recommendation 2.1: That the State Government absorbs the housing debt across all government departments.**

Currently Housing Tasmania receives \$21 million per year from the Commonwealth government. Approximately \$16 million of this money goes immediately back to the Commonwealth into debt repayment.<sup>xv</sup> This is a clear impediment to the sustainability of Housing Tasmania and its ability to make any long term plans regarding the increase of stock and inhibits the adequate maintenance of existing stock.

### **2.2 Maintenance of existing stock**

**Recommendation 2.2: That the State Government allocates additional funds specifically for the maintenance of existing public housing stock.**

One of the main complaints Shelter Tasmania hears about public housing from both tenants and associated services is the quality of existing public housing stock. Drafts, condensation and mould are a particular issue in the North and North West, which results in high costs of heating. Ravenswood Neighbourhood House called a community meeting with twenty-eight public housing tenants on the issue in July 2012. It was found that most of the people in the group were suffering from some kind of ill health, which was exacerbated due to poor heating and considerable condensation and mould. People reported sleeping in the lounge room due to the cold and mould in the rest of the house, having to wear 3-4 layers of clothing to stay warm and not using lights due to the high cost of power bills. Shelter Tasmania submits that this poor quality of government housing is unacceptable due to its detrimental impact on tenants health and cost of living and needs to be rectified.

In addition, the quality of stock being transferred from public housing to community housing is also an issue. Community Housing providers are reporting that some stock is being transferred with a \$9,000 maintenance back log. This is merely shifting the cost and risks from Government to community housing providers, which is also unacceptable. This issue will be discussed further under the section on community housing.

### **2.3 Housing and Homelessness Consumer council**

**Recommendation 2.3: That the State Government fund a Housing and Homelessness Consumer Council to provide advice on the implementation and integration of social housing reform.**

Social housing and homelessness reform needs to be based on an open, transparent and collaborative process that fully involves consumers in a meaningful way. Shelter recommends that government aims to work in partnership with social housing tenants and homeless service clients to provide consumer input and risk management advice in all key areas of housing and homelessness reform.

Nearly every other State and Territory in Australia has a Tenant Advisory Committee, Tenant groups and councils or at the very least regular Tenants newsletters. Currently in Tasmania there is no opportunity for public housing tenants to systemically represent, provide information and advocate for the better well-being and lives of public housing tenants across the State. There is also a limited exchange of information between Housing Tasmania and its tenants in regards to policy changes, reform in the sector and stock transfer from public housing to community housing.

## **3. COMMUNITY HOUSING**

Community housing providers are not for profit housing providers who provide property management on a social level for people on low to moderate incomes who need housing. They focus on long-term tenancy and infrastructure and do not provide transitional housing or support services.

The Better Housing Futures program will result in a rapid growth of community housing in Tasmania. In principle, Shelter Tasmania supports the Tasmanian Governments proposed transfer of management of around 4000 Housing Tasmania properties to community housing organisations,

however the transfer of title, quality of stock and enforced government expectations of how the stock will be managed are all potential issues.

Shelter Tasmania urges the State Government to consider the recommendations below in order to avoid the current social housing issues being transferred from government to the not-for-profit sector. Such an outcome would be disappointing and costly in the future.

### **3.1 Transfer of Title**

**Recommendation 3.1: Fifty per cent of the Housing Tasmania stock transferred to community housing should be transferred with full title.**

It has been reported to Shelter Tas that some of the public stock being transferred across is in poor condition and needs immediate maintenance and repairs. In order to take on liability in terms of maintenance, community housing providers need surety to leverage on at a later date. With no seed funding it is difficult to foresee how community housing providers are going to be able to fix and maintain stock at a higher standard than exists currently.

In addition, community housing tenants are eligible for Commonwealth Rent Assistance but not bond assistance because the title of stock is owned by government. This is a significant barrier and disincentive for low income earners moving into community housing.

### **3.2 Diversity of Stock to be transferred**

**Recommendation 3.2: Allocated stock for transfer must be varied in terms of size, location and condition.**

Community Housing providers are concerned that the allocated stock for transfer is in poor condition and are located in suburbs renowned for poorly maintained stock, high tenancy turn over and poor rental history. In terms of viability and sustainability for the organisations it is important to mix up the stock so that they are able to build a base and portfolio and that the business remains viable.

### **3.3 Tenant Engagement Fund**

**Recommendation 3.3: That the State Government fund a Tenant engagement fund, which will educate and encourage tenants to transfer their tenancy from public housing to community housing properties.**

Many tenants, particularly long term public housing tenants are apprehensive about transferring from public housing to community housing. Reasons for this include:

- General lack of information;
- The need to ensure consistency, transparent and fairness across all stock transfer areas;
- the fact that community housing providers offer fixed term lease agreements instead of ongoing leases;
- Tenants are familiar with Housing Tasmania's policies and procedures; and

- The lag time between the 'Better Housing Futures' announcement and the actual transfer of stock.

Shelter Tasmania recommends a consistent communication strategy and public relations exercise targeted in Clarendon and Rokeby and the other three proposed suburb transfer areas to encourage tenants to move from public housing to community housing. This could be done through appropriate neighbourhood houses with the assistance of independent advocacy groups.

### **3.4 Community Housing Regulation**

**Recommendation 3.4: That Shelter Tasmania be funded by the State Government to assist community housing providers with the soon to be implemented National Regulation of Community Housing.**

A key role of Shelter Tasmania is building the capacity of the housing and homelessness sector. The National regulation of Community Housing will be introduced into Tasmania in 2013.

Whilst the Regulation is not compulsory to community housing providers it is assumed that Regulation will be a necessary condition of future growth funding. Shelter's members who are community housing providers have requested additional assistance and support from Shelter as a lot of organisations are on new ground with the stock transfer and regulatory compliance. Currently the community housing providers in Tasmania vary with many generally quite small and fragmented and require Shelter's assistance as the peak body to build the capacity of the sector.

### **3.5 Rates and Water bills**

**Recommendation 3.5: That the State Government gives additional funds to community housing providers to cover rates and water bills for those properties to which Housing Tasmania holds title.**

Currently community housing providers are expected to pay rates on houses to which they do not hold title. Shelter Tasmania recommends that the State Government works in partnership with local councils to subsidise rates payment on such properties.

In addition, community housing providers are facing additional costs in regards to water for strata complexes.

## **4. PRIVATE RENTAL MARKET**

### **4.1 Provision of Rent and Bond assistance**

**Recommendation 4.1(a): That the State Government increase current resources in relation to the provision of rent and bond assistance to low-income Tasmanians.**

The CA\$H program run by Colony 47 in the South and the Private Rental Support Service (PRSS) run by Anglicare in the North and North-West are extremely important and beneficial services for Tasmanian low income earners. In 2011-2012 the services gave financial assistance to 4163

households and non-financial assistance to 7114 people.<sup>xvi</sup> Such services are extremely important in enabling people to access long-term housing and avoid less desirable outcomes such as transitional housing or homelessness.

**Recommendation 4.1(b): That eligibility for bond and rent assistance be extended to cover all community housing tenants (and Special Residential Facility tenants) on low incomes with an increased budget to enable the extension.**

The housing agenda over the past few years has resulted in substantial growth in community housing providers and Special Residential Facilities (SRF).<sup>1</sup> However, despite consistent lobbying, the eligibility of bond assistance for all community housing tenants has not been addressed. Currently, some tenants are eligible for bond and other forms of Private Rental Support Services (PRSS) assistance while others are not eligible, not for reasons of income or need but because of the title arrangement of the provider. The tenants are still the same client group on low incomes paying similar rent with the need to access bond. This lack of equity is even more highlighted now with the proposed transfer of 4000 tenancies to selected community housing providers from public housing whilst retaining title to the property. All of these tenants will be ineligible for rent and bond assistance.

This anomaly needs to be addressed this year in line with the reform agenda to assist tenants to transfer to community housing to improve the support and outcomes for all tenants.

## **4.2 Minimal Standards**

**Recommendation 4.2: That minimal housing standards be incorporated in the Residential Tenancy Act 1997 and that the Office of Consumer Affairs and Fair Trading is adequately funded to monitor and enforce compliance.**

There is broad agreement from all sectors contributing to the review of the Residential Tenancy Act about the need for tenancy quality standards to protect the most vulnerable from unscrupulous landlords. To effectively do this and enforce other laws associated with tenancy, Consumer Affairs and Fair Trading needs to have adequate resources for proactive monitoring, enforcement and dispute resolution. This funding can come, in part from, returns on bonds held with the Rental Deposit Authority, fines from breaches of the Act and general government revenue.

## **4.3 Co-tenant project for older Tasmanians**

**Recommendation 4.3: That the State Government fund a co-tenant service for elderly people in the private rental market.**

Co-tenancy represents a valuable and inexpensive option for older Tasmanians that maintains independence whilst reducing social isolation. It works to reduce costs in rent, utilities and other items such as food. Shelter Tasmania proposes that the State Government fund a pilot service that provides support and assistance to plan, enter into and maintain a co-tenancy situation involving two or more occupants. This could include sharing of private rental housing or a share arrangement where one person owns a dwelling and is seeking someone to share that dwelling. The development

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<sup>1</sup> Note boarding house tenants, including the SRF tenants are not charged bond but would benefit from other PRSS assistance such as help with rent.

of this pilot project should be done in full consultation with older Tasmanians and other key stakeholders. Shelter Tasmania recommends that the service be run through a community service in the non-government sector.

## 5. HOMELESSNESS

Specialist Homelessness Services (SHS) are organisations that receive government funding to deliver specialist homelessness services to a client. This includes services that provide emergency and transitional accommodation as well as outreach and other support services.

In June 2011, KPMG were engaged by the Department of Health and Human Services to review the support and accommodation service system. As a result of this report, a new service model, which is essentially a Front door service model, is to be implemented in June 2013. At the time of writing this submission, details of the final structure and implementation of the front door model were yet to be announced and a huge degree of uncertainty remains as to what the model will entail.

### 5.1 Specialist Homelessness Service Brokerage dollars

**Recommendation 5.1: That the Specialist Homelessness Services brokerage dollars continue to be offered and managed by Specialist Homelessness Services; and that (a) the amount is supplemented to include an amount equal to the previous 10 years indexation amounts, and (b) it receives annual indexation from now on.**

To date, \$400,000 per annum is allocated to SHS brokerage dollars and are largely spent on acquiring emergency accommodation in caravan parks, pub tops, hotels and motels. Expenditure is also significant in the areas of establishing long-term accommodation with the purchase of whitegoods, advertising for properties and removal costs.

Despite rising costs across the board in the ten year period since brokerage funds were introduced, remarkably there has been no indexation applied to the initial \$400 000. Accommodation related costs have escalated as has the costs of white goods, security deposits and rent, electricity costs, food, cleaning and maintenance. The impact of not applying indexation to these funds has meant an actual decrease in the dollars available to clients experiencing homelessness or at risk.<sup>xvii</sup>

Currently the distribution of brokerage dollars are primarily administered by seven SHS, referred to as 'case planning and support services' and 'transitional support services'. Shelter understands that the administration of these dollars is somehow to be administered through the front door model, however as yet the final details are unclear.

### 5.2 Interpreting Fees

**Recommendation 5.2: That SHS are exempt from interpreting fees associated with clients accessing their services and funding is provided to cover the cost of interpreter fees.**

In the past few years there has been an increase in Culturally and Linguistically Diverse people accessing agencies and requiring interpreter services.

When SHS brokerage first became available many service were able to apply for and receive an exemption from the fees attracted by the utilisation of Telephone Interpreting Services (TIS). Unfortunately for nearly all services, these exemptions are no longer available. This has seen a rise, (particularly in the South, due to settlement policies) in the expenditure of SHS brokerage on TIS.

### 5.3 Young Homeless Tasmanians

**Recommendation 5.3(a): That the State Government funds a supported accommodation model for young people in the North West and the South, similar to Thyne House.**

Currently in Tasmania it is extremely difficult for disadvantaged young people to secure long-term housing. Shelter members have particularly identified the age group of 15-17 year olds who are unable to return home and have no other housing options.

Thyne House, a Supported Youth Accommodation Facility in Launceston has been a successful youth housing model. Currently it provides accommodation and support to 30 young people – 16 to 25 years old.

In the 9 months that Thyne House has been operational:

- 33% of those previously homeless had improved living skills
- 50% have improved connections with family and community
- 75% have increased participation in training, education & employment
- 83% have increased access to health & social services

Shelter Tasmania recommends a similar supported accommodation model for young people in the North West and the South of the State as currently there is no equivalent.

**Recommendation 5.3(b): That new dollars be made available for a supported accommodation service specifically to meet the needs of teenage pregnant women and teenage mothers and their children.**

Karinya's Young Women Services 'Young Mums and Bubs' program works with young parents, 16-19 years to address issues of homelessness, child and maternal health, transition to parenting and retaining focus on young women's continued development. The new program has been running for two months in partnership with Uniting Care's Pregnant Young Parents Program and has funding for 3 years from Clarendon Children's Foundation.

Despite this program, a critical gap still exists with high numbers of pregnant teens accessing emergency services and accommodation with no choice but to access unsafe and inappropriate living arrangements. Services that specifically offer support to young pregnant women and young women and their children are still desperately needed in the south and the north-west of Tasmania. At a time when early intervention in the area of child protection is a major focus, funding appropriate services for this target group are a priority.

### 5.4 Older Homeless Tasmanians

**Recommendation 5.4: That the State Government work with the Commonwealth government to have a model similar to Wintringham implemented in Tasmania.**

Wintringham is a highly targeted welfare company working with homeless and financially disadvantaged older people. The majority of Wintringham clients are male, single and have

experienced homelessness. The Wintringham model developed from a melding of aged care, social justice and homeless service principles. Wintringham has an array of 'models of care', from those that are extremely structured and directive, to those which focus on empowering residents and responding to their requests. This enables Wintringham to adapt to peoples individual needs rather than creating a specific model for all. This includes taking into account addictions and related behavioural problems and working with each client to balance their health and wellbeing. financial resources and continued addictive behaviour.

The majority of Wintringham's funding is Federal aged care funding. However, its identification as a housing service has also enabled the organisation to use a whole-of-government approach rather than relying exclusively upon funding from Commonwealth and State aged care departments. Wintringham has never applied or accepted money from the homeless service system. Clients and residents are elderly and treated as part of the aged care services system. Wintringham charges lower than the standard aged care fee, set at 79% of the aged pension.

With the ageing of the Tasmanian population and increased number of older people experiencing homelessness this would be a timely response for this growing need for housing and support.

## **6. MENTAL HEALTH AND HOUSING**

Not all people who are homeless have mental ill health, yet the pressures of homelessness take their toll on peoples' mental health. It is fair to assume that in comparison to the rest of the population, subsections of the mental health population are at greater risk of homelessness, and subsections of the homeless population are at greater risk of mental ill health as a result of the pressures of homelessness.<sup>xviii</sup> This was clear in the 2011 survey of homeless people in Hobart where of the 44 people surveyed, 34 (77%) had a mental illness.

**Recommendation 6.1: That DHHS fund a model of alternative cluster style housing that incorporates intensive support for people with serious and complex mental health issues.**

The provision of appropriate and affordable social housing is one of the most effective ways of dealing with the co-morbidity of mental illness and homelessness.<sup>xix</sup> It is important that such housing is jointly funded by both Housing and Mental Health dollars to ensure adequate support and housing options. Shelter Tasmania has noticed that mental health and housing tend to work in silos with the assumption that funding for support will automatically result in housing and funding for housing will automatically result in support.

Currently in Tasmania, in-patient mental health treatment services and immediate emergency accommodation facilities bear the burden of attempting to meet Tasmania's accommodation requirements for people with mental health. Whilst evidence exists that housing can prevent hospitalisation for people with mental illness, the lack of supported accommodation facilities means services attempt to 'hold' service users within inadequate short and medium-term accommodation facilities. The lack of exit points from these services is a huge issue as there are extremely limited housing options for people with mental health issues who are in need of ongoing supported housing.

The Commonwealth 2012 Mental Health Report Card stated that no-one should be 'discharged from hospitals, custodial care, mental health or drug and alcohol related treatment services into homelessness'.<sup>xx</sup> This issue was recognised in the Tasmanian Homelessness Plan 2010-2013, with an action to 'develop a clinical protocol for people leaving hospital care to ensure appropriate exit planning including linkages to housing and support'.<sup>xxi</sup> Shelter Tasmania would like to re-iterate that even if such a protocol existed it would be difficult to follow as limited suitable housing options exist for people with serious mental health problems.

An example of successful supported accommodation program and one to be considered as a possible model for housing those with a mental illness is the NSW Government's Housing and Accommodation Support Initiative (HASI). The 2011 second evaluation report on the HASI model key findings were:

- Most HASI consumers were living in a range of stable accommodation options including public, community and private housing. Consumers seldom moved house, and when they did, it was usually for positive reasons;
- A significant reduction in rates, frequency and duration of hospitalisation; and
- A majority of HASI consumer had a high degree of independence in their daily living skills and 54% were independently participating in social and recreational activities.<sup>xxii</sup>

Shelter recommends that a model is developed in full consultation with consumers with research based on best practise models.

## **7. MIGRANT AND REFUGEE HOUSING**

The Settlement projects that support new and emerging communities in Tasmania are largely effective with targeted funding. However, finding appropriate long-term housing for people who are part of the program is an ongoing issue.

**Recommendation 7.1: That the State Government funds a small cluster model of single bedroom housing specifically for migrants and refugees.**

Services who run the settlement projects in Tasmania, have reported a shift in people who access the services. Originally, families were coming directly from refugee camps and being flown to Australia, however, due to the shift in the Commonwealth's immigration policy a majority of clients are now single males who have come to Australia illegally by boat and spent a number of years in detention centres. The recent announcement that the Pontville Detention Centre is to be re-opened indicates that this will be the ongoing trend in the next few years.

The private rental market is the only housing option for many of these clients, which is generally unaffordable and difficult to access for low income single people. Housing is essential for them to have a base to find work and integrate into the community.

## 8. ABORIGINAL HOUSING

### **Recommendation 8.1 – That the State Government fund a culturally appropriate housing option for elderly Aboriginal people in the North.**

Aboriginal people generally have a shorter life expectancy and earlier onset of chronic disease, which means that a greater proportion of Aboriginal people need care at an earlier age.<sup>xxiii</sup> This fact is recognised by the Commonwealth, as is the associated need for different aged care planning. Aged planning for the general population is generally targeted at people who are 70 and over, whereas amongst Aboriginal people the targeted age is 50 and over.

Shelter Tasmania submits that an appropriate model for the housing of Aboriginal elderly people should be developed in full consultation with the Aboriginal community, particularly Aboriginal Elders. This model may be an independent living model or may range from independent living to more high care facilities depending on the needs and wants of the community. Community is an essential part of Aboriginal culture and would need to be incorporated into the model from the very start of the development process.<sup>xxiv</sup>

## 9. SUSTAINABLE RESOURCING OF THE COMMUNITY SECTOR

### 9.1 Equal Remuneration Order funding

The state, territory and federal governments continue to negotiate funding that is to be made available to fund the Equal Remuneration Order (ERO) made after the decision in the land mark Equal Pay Case. It is essential for the ongoing viability of service delivery in the community sector that state calculations for the payment of ERO funding in the forward estimates are based on the previously agreed grant indexation formula, not the reduction in indexation of grants made in 2011-2012 and 2012-2013 Budgets.<sup>xxv</sup>

#### **Recommendation 9.1: That the State Government provide adequate funding in the forward estimates to meet obligations under the Equal Remuneration Order.**

Shelter Tasmania endorses the above recommendation as stated in the TasCOSS 2013-2014 Budget submission. It is essential that both the State and Federal Government adequately fund services to provide for the supplementations associated with the ERO so that the quality and range of services within the sector are not adversely affected.

### 9.1 Indexation

#### **Recommendation 9.2: That the State Government restore the agreed full formula for indexed funding of grants for DHHS-funded organisations, and the adoption of this formula for community service organisations funded by other state government departments.**

Shelter Tasmania endorses the above recommendation as stated in the TasCOSS 2013-2014 Budget submission. The rate of indexation that the Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) allocated for funding community service organisations (CSOs) in the financial years 2011-12 and 2012-13 was 2.25%. This was below the rate negotiated between the sector and the Department,

which provided for 3.3% indexation for the four years prior to 2011-12 according to an agreed formula. The estimated cuts to the sector from reduced indexation in 2011-12 were \$3.6 million, and more in 2012-13.<sup>xxvi</sup> TasCOSS's recently commissioned independent research on the impacts this reduced indexation has had on the sector demonstrates a cumulative negative impact on the sector's ability to maintain accessible, quality services for clients and to retain a quality workforce.<sup>xxvii</sup>

### **Contact Details:**

Shelter Tasmania is happy to discuss any of the above recommendations. If you have any questions or queries then please contact Shelter's Executive Officer:

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