

Shelter SA MEDIA RELEASE

Living in Fear

Domestic violence is the leading cause of homelessness in Australia and approximately 40% of people receiving specialist homelessness services are children. Shelter SA, the peak body for housing in the State welcomes all initiatives that aim to reduce the harm caused by domestic violence, including the recently proposed changes to residential tenancy laws and we commend Minister Gail Gago for her initiative on the reforms to date¹.

Executive Director of Shelter SA, Dr. Alice Clark said today, “all adults and children have the right to live without the fear of violence. Ideally, government and community resources would focus on the prevention of domestic violence, child abuse and neglect, not only at the crisis end”. Shelter SA has asked State Government on more than one occasion to work more holistically, across Government portfolios to ensure that statutory agencies are capable of meeting their responsibilities to all South Australians. It seems that the homeless sector is one of ‘last resort’ when policies and systems fail to meet the community’s needs in the areas of child protection, mental health and disability.

Dr. Clark said “its imperative for homelessness to be elevated to the highest level and led by our Premier. Statistics recently released by the Department of Communities and Social Inclusion (Homeless 2 Home Specialist Homelessness Services Agency Contract Management Report) demonstrate that there is an unacceptable lack of resources available to enable State Government agencies to meet their responsibilities to their clients. I am deeply concerned about the safety of our children - more than 7,000 children were in receipt of specialist homelessness services (2013-14) and there were approximately 6,000 clients with mental health issues”. Alarming, our Nation’s First Peoples continue to be overrepresented with more than 6,000 accessing homelessness services in a year. Without the Premier’s authority and directive to all Ministers, their portfolios and departments, it is unlikely that this situation will change.

If State Government is serious about addressing domestic violence there is much more to be done. Shelter SA would like to see a range of evidence-based initiatives funded and implemented that include education for our children around communication, problem-solving and conflict resolution, financial assistance for victims of domestic violence and community education that addresses gender inequality and violence. Most importantly, governments and communities need to work together to increase the supply of social and affordable housing to make it easier for people to maintain their tenancies and, if needed, find alternative accommodation in a crisis. Our domestic violence sector needs long-term, ongoing funding so agencies can attend to preventative services. Changes to the Residential Tenancies Act are welcome, but alone, they are not enough.

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¹ <http://www.cbs.sa.gov.au/wcm/rentingletting/dv/>