



2 August 2018

Leslie Guy  
Secretary to the Committee  
Select Committee on Poverty in South Australia  
Parliament House  
Adelaide SA 5000

Dear Leslie

Shelter SA commends our members of parliament for initiating the Select Committee on Poverty. We would like to register our interest in attending to present oral evidence to the Committee.

As the peak body for housing in South Australia, many of the concerns we wish to raise with the Committee are related to housing affordability for people living on low incomes. We attach a simple outline of our policy positions to inform the Committee. Our policy positions are evidence-based and we look to high quality data and academic literature to inform our work, in conjunction with community consultation, to ensure that our advocacy is firmly grounded.

Unfortunately, the many South Australians who are unable to secure adequate and stable employment are faced with little choice when it comes to attaining an affordable place to call home. As South Australia has lost more than 20,000 public housing properties over the last twenty years, it is no surprise that we are seeing approximately the same number of people receiving specialist homelessness services every year, with numbers steadily rising. For people living on low incomes, the gap between paying 30% of household income as rent, and the high cost of private rents is too large to achieve or sustain. When unemployment is coupled with housing and utilities costs, South Australians are the recipients of a triple financial burden and there is little relief in sight.

The number of people who are in need of crisis accommodation are also on the rise. The supply of emergency beds available frequently does not meet demand and increasingly, we are placing people in motels as a response to homelessness. At our recent workshop in Elizabeth, service providers reported that there are approximately thirty families placed in motels every night, in the North alone, sometimes for months at a time. The thirty families include 100 children. You will appreciate that motels are far from ideal accommodation for families and children, where there are no play areas, no cooking facilities and little to occupy young people and we would like this situation to be urgently addressed through improving access to social housing and support for these families. The size of this problem is not insurmountable however, the workers that we speak with from the social

housing and homelessness sectors, describe a system that is completely blocked. With fewer appropriate short, medium and long-term housing outcomes that are achievable, we are seeing a constant churn of people through the system who are not having their housing needs met.

The number of rough sleepers across South Australia has also increased. At our community engagement event in Victor Harbor for example, workers from Goolwa said that there are more than 100 rough sleepers in their area. People are locked out of the private rental market and home ownership is out of reach in the South.

You do not need to look very far to see that many of our human service providers spend time and energy on fundraising activities. Even when services receive large amounts of government funding, they are still fundraising to provide meals for individuals and families that cannot provide food for themselves and other emergency relief. Surely there is something very wrong with a society, that must routinely rely on this type of charity, funded by donations, to feed our citizens.

Our child protection system is not functioning effectively and our responses to domestic violence are largely crisis driven and we believe that poverty is the underlying condition for these unhealthy trends. South Australia needs models of service delivery that are evidence-based and funded sufficiently to work with lower risk children, young people and families experiencing crises, as well as male perpetrators of domestic violence.

The most pressing practical measure that must be implemented is to urgently cease selling public housing and reducing the stock. We must strategically manage our public housing assets to grow the net stock. Recently we were informed that there are more than 500 tenantable public housing properties in South Australia, some of which have been vacant for more than 12 months. Some of the vacant properties are in regional South Australia, however it is difficult to understand why there are so many properties and the length of time they have been vacant. Without a safe, affordable, secure and appropriate home, we will continue to see the numbers of people living with housing stress and experiencing homelessness moving in the wrong direction.

Shelter SA would like to see State Government treat social and affordable housing as infrastructure, not welfare. A critical measure for our members of parliament to consider is to budget and spend across government, portfolios and departments. For example, the private rental assistance program (PRAP) is vital for people and families living on low incomes to access bond guarantees for private rental properties. When budget savings are directed to individual departments like Housing SA, and reductions to programs like PRAP are considered, it is difficult to make sense of the logic of denying already vulnerable citizens access to a bond and therefore the private rental market. Individuals and families affected will simply funnel through to other, more expensive and overburdened systems, like specialist homelessness services, mental health facilities, hospitals, prisons and child protection. We continue to spend at the wrong end of the system, creating more prison beds, and removing children from families, rather than creating the right conditions for people to thrive.

Our concerns about some of our most vulnerable citizens, raised last year through our work on rooming houses, remain largely unaddressed, and life for these people is really one of abject poverty, that denies citizens access to their human rights. Poverty is causing unacceptable deprivation and exclusion in South Australia, and a good place to start would be with ensuring proper shelter for all.

Recent media attention on anti-social behaviour in Hutt Street has negatively impacted on the Hutt Street Centre and its provision of critical day services to people experiencing homelessness, who are also living in poverty. Shelter SA has repeatedly publicly stated that the systems response to

increased anti-social behaviour and drug and alcohol issues, must be a review of the Public Intoxication Act, which is outdated and does not embrace the principles of harm minimisation. We recommend the past work of the Aboriginal Legal Rights Movement S.A. in this area, and ask the Committee to consider a review as part of its work. Affordable, safe and secure housing is one principal of harm minimisation, as is adequate drug and alcohol rehabilitation services, both of which have been reduced to fail to meet demand. The model of day centres seems to be outdated. Shelter SA acknowledges that people experiencing poverty and homelessness have urgent needs that must be addressed, however the irony is that they need a safe place to rest overnight as well as a place to belong during the day. The gentrification of the city and new construction should not override the right of community services to operate from any particular location nor the right of people in need to access those services.

We also recommend that South Australia looks into the way that New York City addresses housing through their Department of Homeless Services, in particular their homelessness prevention and private rental programs. Private landlords and real estate agents can register properties and single rooms, which tenants pay 30% of household income in rent, subsidised by government. The provision of public housing is critical, however, South Australia needs to tap into every source of housing that is affordable for people living on low incomes.

We attach some of our recent reports for the Committee's consideration to substantiate the issues raised in this submission. Please contact us if you require any further information. We will look forward to appearing to provide evidence to the Committee in person and to learning the outcomes of the process.

Regards

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**The South Australian peak body for housing**



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*We acknowledge and respect the Kurna people as the traditional custodians of the ancestral lands we live and work on and their deep feelings of attachment and relationship to country.*

Links: [Elizabeth Workshop](#), [Rooming House Report](#), [Community Engagement in Planning Report](#), [Domestic Violence Workshop Report](#)