

**Shelter SA Submission**  
**to the**  
**SA Housing Strategy**  
**Green Paper 2011**

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**Shelter SA**  
Housing: a basic human right

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# Executive Summary

## South Australian Housing Strategy Green Paper

The South Australian government released its Housing Strategy Green Paper (the Strategy) in October 2011. A green paper is a draft policy document and citizens and organisations are invited to comment on the Strategy via a written submission process. After the submission period closes on 9 December 2011, State government proposes that it will take these submissions into consideration before releasing a White Paper (final paper) outlining future government directions for housing.

## Shelter SA

Shelter SA (Shelter) is the State peak body for housing and homelessness, advocating for the interests of low income and disadvantaged South Australians and their housing needs via policy work, research and education. Shelter SA is a member organisation and members represent a diverse range of stakeholders including government, non-government and private sector agencies and interested individuals.

## Shelter SA Submission to the Green Paper

The Shelter submission and recommendations are informed by five sources of data. Firstly, analysis of the Strategy as a whole and the terms and concepts it contains is supported by secondary data from academic literature and research reports. Shelter conducted an independent consumer consultation on behalf of Housing SA. Consumers comprised people on a low income and/or living with disadvantage, and included people who are older, younger, disabled, unemployed from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds and homeless from a range of housing tenures, including Housing SA, community housing, transitional accommodation, private rental and home ownership and the second source of information informing the submission is the consumer data and its analysis. SACOSS Policy Council members and the Youth Affairs Council of S.A. contributed their specialist knowledge of particular disadvantaged groups. The fourth source of information is a consultation conducted by Shelter during 2011 with members and non-members and the fifth source includes Shelter SA's Aboriginal Homeless and Housing Support Branch (the Aboriginal Branch), Agencies Supporting Housing for Refugees and Asylum Seekers Branch (ASHRA) and the Shelter SA Board (with particular reference to the Housing SA Access Project).

## Aims

The aims of this submission are to

- provide an evidence-based policy analysis of the Strategy;
- include the perspectives and experiences of low income and disadvantaged South Australian housing consumers about their housing needs and aspirations that relate to the Strategy;
- include input from a number of other stakeholders; and
- provide an independent viewpoint and recommendations for consideration by State government.

## **Format of this Submission**

The first section of this submission includes a description of the methodology and methods that guided the approach to developing the content and conducting the consumer consultation, accompanied by consumer participant demographic data. Section 2 contains an analysis of the language and concepts used in the Strategy and compares these to how consumers talked about where they live. Needs are discussed in the Strategy but it is unclear how these are defined and how consumer needs will be decided and this is highlighted in Section 3. Section 4 looks at some of the assumptions in the Strategy and the last section, 5, looks at the directions with a focus on those for Aboriginal housing.

## **Conclusions**

The Strategy appears to be a commentary on current activities rather than a policy document with any clear vision about how to meet the housing needs of South Australians. The aspirations of South Australian citizens and non-government organisations are not included in the Strategy and there is a noticeable disjuncture between State government's vision and positioning of "communities" and how people experience where they live and articulate their basic needs. A comparison of the Strategy with the Western Australia Strategy for Affordable Housing highlights the paucity of direction it contains and it is recommended that the final version use the same format as the WA Strategy to clearly outline the policy objectives and the actions government will pursue with associated performance indicators to measure progress.

## **Shelter SA's Major Recommendations – Themes**

The recommendations contained in this submissions will inform Shelter's strategic directions during the next two and a half years and a systematic program of work will be carried out which is directly related to these policy and practice positions. The major themes of the recommendations are as follows:

- 1.** Adequate support is required for low income and disadvantaged South Australian's to meet their basic needs and to achieve better personal and housing outcomes - well developed and maintained personal relationships are an integral aspect of the support;
- 2.** Consumer perspectives and the aspirations of South Australians must be included in the final version of the Strategy; and
- 3.** Policy must be evidence-based **and** include consumer perspectives, using clear language, with transparent objectives, implementation and evaluation strategies.

## Section 1 – Methodology, Methods and Consumer Demographic Data

Critical theory is methodological approach used in the social sciences as a theoretical framework for activities designed to address practical problems. The policy analysis of this Strategy is informed by critical theory because it emphasises the inclusion of unheard voices that emanate from those who do not or cannot normally participate in such activities. Placing social issues and problems in context assists to bridge the gap between theory and practice. By attending to inclusionary methods, this work fulfills the requirements of research that utilises a critical perspective – to explain and interpret the experiences of those involved, to empower them, and to disclose the myths around the issues involved (Sarantakos, 1998).

Participatory action research (PAR) falls within the paradigm of critical theory and there are a wide range of methods that can be applied using PAR. A broad approach to problem-solving and effecting social change were the major reasons PAR was selected as the most appropriate method of engaging consumers in this work (Hart, 1995). The work became part of the change process (Patton, 1990) through engaging participants in shedding light on subjective meanings of community, and their housing needs and aspirations. Focus group methods were used to engage low income and disadvantaged consumers to draw out their perspectives on their housing needs and aspirations, meanings of community and the concept of affordable housing. Themes were developed and fed back to consumer participants in an iterative process and focus group activities were developed on an ongoing basis, so that consumer participants were able to provide rich, in-depth information about their housing and housing needs. Consumers were recruited purposefully because of their experience and knowledge of living on a low income with disadvantage, using Shelter SA member networks so that conversations with individuals from member organisations resulted in careful recruitment of consumers paying attention to the appropriateness of approaching them to participate, sensitivity around their capacity to attend a series of meetings, to contribute to group discussions and their immediate health and housing situations.

### Consumer Participant Profile

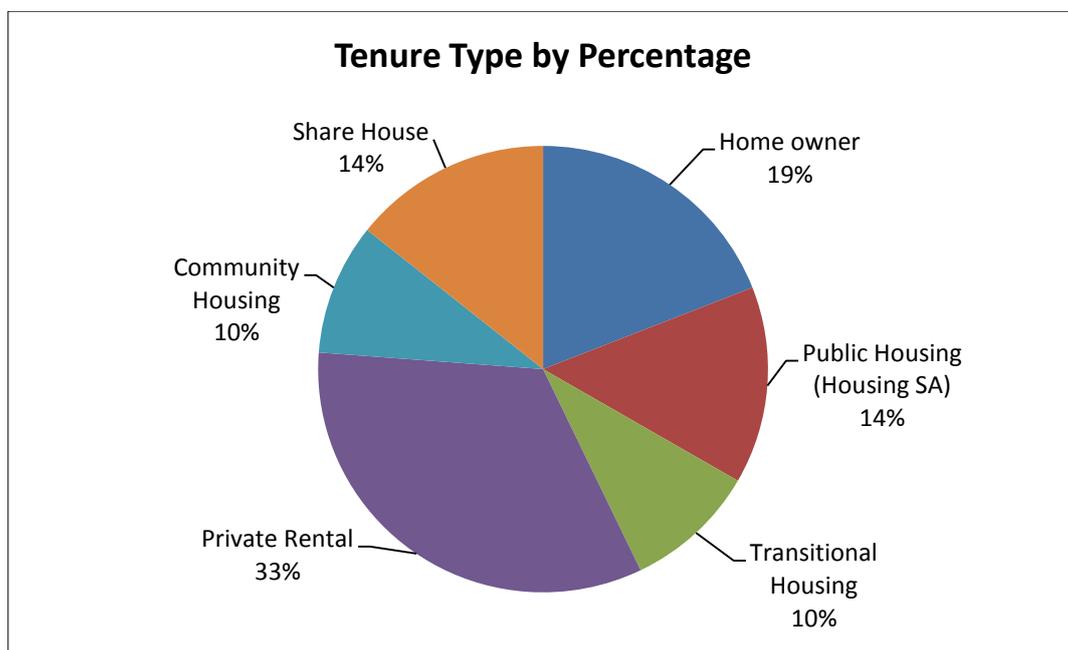
21 consumers participated in Shelter SA’s consumer consultation. Participants ranged in age from 15-19 years to 70-74 years:

Age	No. of Respondents	Percentage
15-19	1	5%
20-24	3	14%
25-29	2	10%
30-34	2	10%
35-39	4	19%
40-44	2	10%
50-54	2	10%
55-59	2	10%
60-64	1	5%
65-69	1	5%
70-74	1	5%
<b>Total</b>	<b>21</b>	<b>100%</b>

Of the 21 participants 14 were male and 7 were female. 5 people indicated that they were employed, 7 unemployed, 2 retired while 6 were either studying, receiving income support payments or stay-at-home parents. Participants were predominantly single (10 people), 2 people were married, 4 divorced, 4 were in de-facto relationships and one person indicated their marital status as “widower”.

Of the 21 participants, 3 people lived with a disability, 3 people supported children with a disability, 1 person identified as being Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander, and 4 people were from culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) backgrounds.

Participants predominantly lived in private rental (10 people), of this number 3 people lived in share housing, 4 people were home owners, 3 people lived in public housing (Housing SA), 2 people lived in community housing (not-for-profit landlord) and 2 people lived in transitional housing:



Three focus groups were held in metropolitan Adelaide on September 20<sup>th</sup>, October 4<sup>th</sup> and October 11<sup>th</sup> and one was held in Port Pirie on October 31<sup>st</sup>, 2011.

## Section 2 – Language

The Minister's Foreword contains a claim that South Australia leads the nation in housing innovation. The 2005 housing strategy has not been evaluated to date, and regardless of whether this claim is evidence-based, there is still room for improvement in housing for low income and disadvantaged people and in homelessness strategies and services. A statement contained in the Minister's Foreword is that "Through the Woodville West redevelopment we're shaping neighbourhoods and setting the agenda for what we want and need communities to look like in the future" however, the "we" is ill-defined and it is difficult to ascertain where, if at all the aspirations of South Australians are reflected in the Strategy. If this statement alludes to what government wants and needs communities to look like, it must be balanced with the perspectives of people outside of government in order to bring about change or undertake developmental activities. Without including a more balanced view, it will be impossible for State Government to "fulfill the dreams of thousands of South Australians and support the most vulnerable". If people are to "achieve their potential" as stated in the Foreword, housing affordability, the costs of living and low income levels must be addressed, not only "keeping people close to schools, hospitals and other services, including transport". Multi-faceted interventions, careful planning and investment in community development activities are required to address the complex issues around housing, support and health. The idea of creating a "consumers' network" is potentially a positive way of engaging low income and disadvantaged South Australians in shaping the future of housing. Operating a consumer network however, is a specialised task that should be conducted independently of government in order to create space for unheard voices, and to encourage freedom of speech without fear of repercussions on tenancies.

**Recommendation 1:** State Government to carefully consider the public Green Paper submissions and provide a transparent explanation of how and where they have included or excluded the aspirations of South Australians, especially those on a low income and living with disadvantage, in the final Strategy.

**Recommendation 2:** State Government to produce a consumer-friendly version of the Strategy to distribute to government and non-government housing, support and health organisations and make it available on their website.

**Recommendation 3:** State Government to remove statements about people achieving their potential from the Strategy as it is not possible for the State Government to realise this goal through their current directions, without multi-faceted solutions and working across health and housing.

**Recommendation 4:** State Government to enter into conversations with Shelter to explore their potential role and appropriate funding to set up and facilitate an independent consumer network and to establish its aims and scope.

### Homelessness Strategy

The Homeless to Home Strategy, H2H software/system and the "integrated homelessness services sector" have not been evaluated to date and it is unknown if services to families or individuals have improved. The real question here is, are clients any better off? One area that does not show improvement is the length of emergency stays in motels, the costs have increased due to extended period of time clients spend in this type of emergency accommodation, which was only ever intended as a very short-term solution to crisis situations. The Strategy should not contain exaggerated claims where they are not substantiated. The National Partnership Agreement on Homelessness includes a range of qualitative evaluation methods but it

is unclear how much weight will be placed on the results of this type of evaluation compared to the statistics that will be produced by H2H. It does not appear that current evaluation methods will have the capacity to capture the extent of need, unmet need, the quality of services or the quality of outcomes for clients.

**Recommendation 5:** State Government to cease making claims that “the homelessness reforms have been implemented” or their “success” until they are evaluated and all evaluation data is made publicly available.

**Recommendation 6:** State Government to make a commitment to balancing the importance of a **combination** of qualitative and quantitative data, placing equal weight on both, in the evaluation of homelessness services.

### **Aboriginal Homelessness**

In terms of Aboriginal homelessness, the Australian Housing and Urban Research Institute (AHURI) has reported that conventional responses to homelessness focus on finding accommodation but for many Aboriginal people, finding accommodation is not necessarily their most crucial support need, and the authors suggest that homelessness can be redefined as losing one’s sense of control over, or legitimacy in, the place where one lives. Three categories of homelessness are developed: public place dwellers, those at risk of homelessness and spiritually homeless people (Australian Housing and Urban Research Institute, 2004). A Department for Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs report “Indigenous Homelessness in Australia” (Department of Families Housing Community Services and Indigenous Affairs, 2009) highlights recommended principles of service delivery and concludes that barriers still exist for Aboriginal Australian’s to access housing.

**Recommendation 7:** State Government to seek agreement from the Aboriginal community about adopting evidence-based definitions of Aboriginal homelessness and adjusting services accordingly.

Also stated in the Minister’s Foreword is, “we’ll need everyone – builders, developers, not for profit organisations, local councils, advocacy groups and many others to provide ideas and support”. This statement is not inclusive of “the most vulnerable” or ordinary South Australians. It is unclear how State government will be able to place a “strong emphasis on setting up neighbourhoods” without engaging residents and citizens in the planning, implementation and evaluation of any housing-related activities and investing significant resources geared towards specific community development activities that target low income and disadvantaged people.

**Recommendation 8:** State Government to allocate and spend funds for significant community development activities and involve the consumers who are targeted in the activities in the planning, implementation and evaluation of the activities.

The Vision and Highlights section of the Strategy is laden with terms that are contentious and ambiguous that are either not defined at all or are inadequately defined. The terms include “communities”, “neighbourhoods”, “inclusive communities/neighbourhoods”, “place-making” and “strengthening community resilience”. Debates about meanings of community have a long history in philosophy, sociology and social science. A large body of theoretical and practical knowledge exists because of this interest. The term “community” is widely used by governments and appears repeatedly in Australian social policies on a National, State and Local level. At the State level, the Strategy refers to building stronger communities.

However, the language of community in social policy generally, and in the current housing Strategy, reflects very conservative and nostalgic views of communities that are at odds with the body of evidence-based information on this topic. In some ways this might be about capturing and perpetuating romantic ideas about close-knit, pre-industrial village communities where everyone knew each other and helped each other in contrast to the “less flattering aspects of community life such as racism, spousal abuse and homophobia” (Wark, 1999). Such conservative definitions ignore the changes that communities have undergone over time (Forrest, 2001, Ife, 2001, Kerr, 2001) and similar conservative definitions do not accurately identify the ways that communities develop and function, nor the ways they can be divisive rather than inclusive (Crow, 2006).

The use of the term communities in social policy emphasises collectivism and mutual support even though society has become increasingly individualistic and unequal. Today, anonymity, individualism and competition (Forrest, 2001, Ife, 2001, Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2004) as well as “diversification, fragmentation and decentralization” (Kerr, 2001) characterise communities. Most Australians live their lives across many fragmented communities of interest and some people find themselves without any communities to which they feel they belong (Hughes, 2007). Reciprocal relationships, a common physical location and common social connections are elements of communities, and other essential elements are “a sense of security, a sense of significance and a sense of solidarity” (Clark, 1992), in other words, feeling safe, a valued role and togetherness. A sense of identity and belonging are also central, subjective elements of meanings of community. Practical definitions of community incorporate the way people experience where they live and both positive and negative aspects of their surrounding geographic areas, neighbours and the length of time people have resided in an area affect how they identify with their surroundings.

Relationships between people are an integral aspect of how place is experienced and governments cannot easily influence how and why these are formed. It is not clear how, if at all, learnings from other State-led housing and urban improvement projects have been incorporated in the current Strategy. Despite funding various community development initiatives and a high level of services in the Local Government Area of Salisbury, for example, poverty and disadvantage continue to be pervasive, and there has been a widening gap between those who are affluent, and those living with multiple disadvantage. If policy is to be evidence-based, theoretical and practical meanings of community must be taken into account and considerable community development activities undertaken to bring about change in communities where feelings of belonging and ownership are weak or non-existent (Clark, 2008).

### **Shelter Consumer Consultation: Local Lifeworlds & What’s happening at your place?**

Policy needs to be premised on theoretical and practical meanings, grounded in both appropriate research literature and a concrete understanding of the lifeworlds of the people it is written for. By lifeworld we mean the world and everyday life as it is experienced by the subject. Lack of genuine engagement runs the risk of problematic implementation if policy goals do not resonate with the realities and aspirations of those people it is directed at. Participants in Shelter’s consumer consultation were asked the open question “what’s happening at your place?” This question enabled participants to talk about what was important *to them* about where they lived using their own language, focussing on topics that were relevant to them. Language is important because it is an indicator of experience that structures action. Participant responses to the question “what’s happening at your place” revealed dominant themes that revolve

around freedom of choice to act, the recognition of change, and factors linked to places in which participants live.

A young male participant drew parallels between his current and previous tenure – highlighting that his contentment with his current tenure is linked to his freedom to do what he wants around the house, in the garden and in relation to lifestyle, freedoms that were denied him in his previous tenure. An older male participant spoke about his choice to remain in private rental despite an illness because it gave him the space he needed and the freedom to use that space to engage in his hobbies. “I won’t move” he said, “because it has a 20 x 20 concrete shed out the back – won’t get that with housing trust...the main reason I wanted the shed and stuff is because I do stuff – I make kites, I do wire sculptures”. A number of other participants spoke about liking where they lived because of the security of their tenancy, liking the area and getting along with their neighbours, as one participant highlights as follows:

Donna<sup>1</sup> had recently secured community housing for herself and her young family in what she described as “a nice area”. She had moved numerous times from places where “druggies” were “doing deals in the front yard” where she had been anxious for the safety of her family and the security of their personal possessions. She said of her new tenure that “it feels good to have security” in a place where “the kids aren’t scared”. Donna reiterated that the new area she was living in had good neighbours; “people are helpful” she said, “you can borrow things, we got help putting up a pergola, we were going to pay them but they said ‘nah, we’ll just do it’”.

Not everybody spoke positively about where they lived. A young female participant spoke about her desire to move out of a Housing SA property because there had been an incident in which someone had “smashed my neighbour’s door down...I was scared...he was carrying a huge knife...in private rental I could get away from all of that”. Another participant highlighted his negative experience represented in the quotes below as follows:

Brian lives in social housing in what he describes as a “reasonably fancy area”. Regardless of the area, Brian has experienced problems with violence and organised crime that has affected his freedom to come and go and his relationships with neighbours. “No-one talks to anyone” he said, “I was like a prisoner in my own home – I kept the windows closed and blinds down and I would only go outside at certain times when cars had left”.

The issues for young people who share private rental properties emerged as being particularly poignant during the consumer consultation. One participant who had shared with people he did not know had discovered that the other tenants were manufacturing drugs at the property. He did not feel safe there, the bathroom could not be used as it was a “distillery” and he came home one day to find all of his belongings dumped outside – he had been “evicted” by the other tenants. He said that “I wouldn’t do that again, it was a bad property”. The same participant adapted a “sleep-out” for his own use as a bedroom in his current share property, including a source of electricity and flooring. He felt that when the landlord did the next inspection, he had potentially financed an “extra bedroom” from his own resources, and the landlord immediately put the rent up as many landlords rent “per-tenant”. Being left with large utilities bills and house-mates moving out unexpectedly had left some younger participants with costs and unpaid

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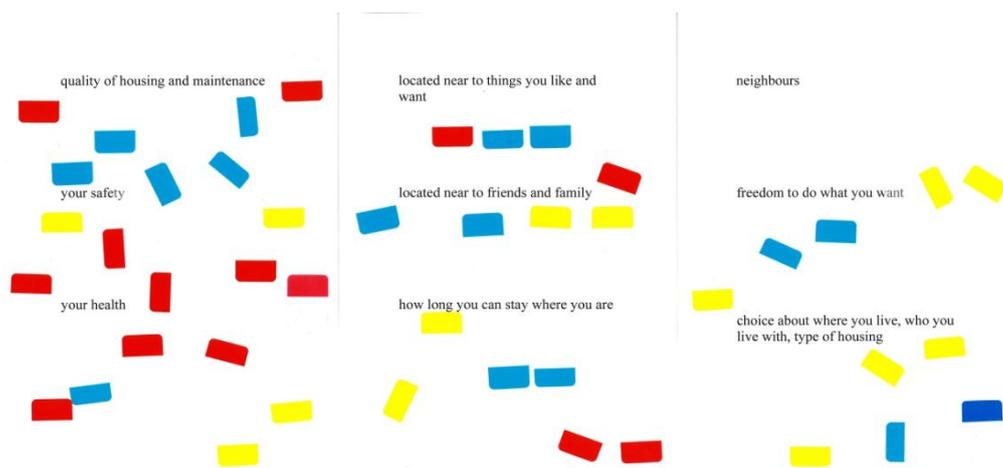
<sup>1</sup> Pseudonyms have been used for participants’ names to protect their privacy.

rent that they could not afford – potentially resulting in being unable to connect utilities in the future because of being left with a debt. Overcrowding is an issue for young people sharing, and participants gave examples of six or seven people living in a three bedroom house. One participant said that he did not know if his name was on the lease, if the landlord knew he had moved in and that he did not know who the landlord was.

When participants talked about what was happening at their place they were implicitly talking about their needs, wants and values. Responses to this question were thematically analysed and themes were presented to the participants at the second meeting as aspects of where they live for consideration and discussion. Participants agreed that these themes were an accurate representation of the most important ideas they had previously expressed. Participants were asked to vote through a participatory voting activity that required participants to prioritise, in terms of importance to them, the three most important aspects about where they live. A ranking system using differently coloured tabs was employed – red symbolised the most important, yellow the second most important, and blue the third most important. Participants chose from nine aspects:

- Neighbours
- Freedom to do what you want
- Choice about where you live, who you live with, type of housing
- Near things you like and want
- Near to friends and family
- How long you can stay where you are
- Quality of housing and maintenance
- Your safety
- Your health

The raw results can be seen in the image below:



Overall, participants highlighted that the most important aspect to them about where they live was health. The second most important aspect about where they live was choice about where they live, who they live with and the type of housing they live in. The third most important aspect about where participants live was quality and maintenance of housing. The most significant issue that participants discussed in relation

to this aspect of housing was problems with getting things fixed in public and private rental properties. There were often lengthy delays in getting maintenance done and hesitancy in requesting maintenance for fear of rents being increased. Several participants talked about their experiences of requesting maintenance and said that often it was carried out by landlords or the relatives of landlords and that work was not of a professional or adequate standard – even though they did not expect things to be perfect, leaking water and blocked drains were of concern. Two participants said that fixing one problem, such as hot water “hammering” from the pipes, would result in a leaky tap, and a further need to contact the landlord. Another participant talked about their past community housing as being infested with redback spiders and despite repeated requests for the spider problem to be addressed and relocation, nothing was done by the landlord. The tallied results from the voting activity can be seen in the table below:

Type	First	Second	Third	Total
Neighbours				0
Freedom to do what you want		I	II	3
Choice about where you live, who you live with, type of housing		III	II	5
Near things you like and want	I		II	3
Near to friends and family		II	I	3
How long you can stay where you are	II	II	II	6
Quality of housing and maintenance	II		III	5
Your safety	II	I		3
Your health	III	II	I	6

The total number of votes given to each aspect (of highest, secondary and tertiary importance) highlights that health and length of tenure are the most important considerations given to where participants live. This was closely followed by choice in where they live, who with, in what type of housing, and the quality and maintenance of that housing. There was discussion amongst some participants who found it difficult to choose between health and safety because they said that you cannot have one without the other. The majority of these participants selected health as their first priority.

Six participants highlighted that health and housing are multi-dimensional problems that intersect with safety, length of tenure and quality and maintenance of housing. The link between housing and health is well-accepted, but needs to underpin program development and service delivery in a more integrated way as Mallett et al (2011) have recommended. Participants indicated that they value choice, and in fact rate the exercise of choice as an aspect of where they live that’s as important as the quality of the housing they live in. The high value that participants placed on choice throws into sharp relief the question of how governments will make communities when participants themselves indicated that they valued making their own choices about where they live. This participatory voting activity further indicates that length of tenure

is an option that should be investigated as an aspect that contributes to secure occupancies (Hulse et al., 2011).

All metropolitan participants in Shelter's consumer consultation were asked if they would volunteer to read the Strategy. Six participants agreed, read the Strategy and subsequently attended a focus group to provide their specific feedback. Although the Strategy is not written for lay people, when participants read the Strategy they were struck by how vague it is in describing a plan for the future, one participant calling the Strategy "fluff". Overall participants felt that the Strategy was very broad and lacked detail on how the promises contained in the document would be delivered. Concerns over the Strategy largely centred on accountability for implementation, one participant saying, "there are no actual strategies here. This is too general, it's not specific enough. It needs implementers to write an implementation plan to go with it. This is barely a blueprint...we want the implementation plan as soon as possible".

This focus group was comprised of both older and younger participants who highlighted different concerns from their reading of the Strategy. The older participants discussed the lack of change over time, one participant saying "we're still doing the same things!". Another participant said that "it's frustrating to see that a lot of things don't change". These participants talked about how the lack of support has led to people being overlooked and "passed along" and an increase in the number of disruptive tenants. Lack of support was spoken about in terms of inadequate funding and how this has caused a lack of continuity in the provision of support, "you have lapses and gaps, which mean that people don't get the support they need". One participant highlighted her concern over how vacancies are managed, saying that "people need to be housed, but there are empty houses".

Younger participants focussed on sustainability and questioned the implicit value of population growth, one participant asking "shouldn't things be sustainable before we progress?" Another participant said, "I thought the population growth was a little scary. Just that they're planning that the population is going to get that big. I don't think we can grow bigger. [If the population grows it means] more shortages of everything, resources, jobs, food, water". Another participant highlighted that the Strategy didn't adequately reflect diversity and different needs represented by culturally and linguistically diverse people, people living in regional areas and Aboriginal people (see sections 4 and 5).

It was after this activity around participants' initial thoughts on the Strategy that group facilitators invited the group to discuss how the term "communities" appears and is used in the Strategy. Still, participants did not talk about where they lived as a "community" but rather in local and contextual terms, such as their street, neighbourhood, local shops and community centres. Group facilitators deliberately used this language to see how participants would respond to the introduction of the term "communities". Participants noted the difference between structural organisation and local constructions of place because they talked about the "idea" that community centres bring people together, but one participant said that even if you have been to a community centre then "You can go back to your street and feel alone again". Those who are disadvantaged, discriminated against, or with high and complex needs are likely to face barriers and have fewer, or a complete lack of, supportive relationships and support is essential for them to develop local relationships. There was a sense that "people just want to live" and that people need to solve their own problems before they can reach out or connect with others living nearby and for one participant, this meant "who cares about the rhetoric in the green paper – people just want to live their lives".

There are organisations and projects that acknowledge the importance of connectedness and are undertaking activities to improve the ways in which people are connected to others in their local area. Examples include Kiikstart, increasing opportunities to access employment and the Journey to Social Inclusion project with a focus on increasing the social connectedness of the long-term homeless. These types of organisations demonstrate awareness of and sensitivity to the importance of forming relationships and meeting basic needs before people can begin to reach their potential. One example of this approach comes from the Adelaide Benevolent Society (ABS) as follows:

The ABS has established a subcommittee that facilitates engagement between the ABS and communities with the aim of improving housing and wellbeing outcomes for the individuals and families within communities. The focus is on improving service delivery to ABS tenants by being well-informed of tenant needs and developing relationships. The key tasks to achieve this are:

- Foster the development of partnerships with community service agencies to improve service delivery to tenants of ABS;
- Provision of background information to the Committee to assist with determining the ABS “target groups” or communities of interest;
- Develop innovative models of housing and service delivery partnerships to improve access to housing for vulnerable groups of people;
- Establish a register of funds, trusts or foundations that can be accessed by ABS to benefit tenants;
- Monitor the management of the relationships between ABS and referrers to ensure appropriate referrals of tenants to ABS are made and accepted;
- Provide advice to management, the Committee and the Property Sub-Committee in relation to the creation of “community friendly” developments;
- Facilitate engagement activities with the tenants e.g. Christmas functions; and
- Develop a process for tenants to provide feedback to ABS in relation to their needs or suggestions for improvement.

**Recommendation 9:** State Government to include theoretical *and* practical definitions of communities in the Strategy in order to adequately understand and include the needs and aspirations of South Australians.

**Recommendation 10:** State Government to remove references to place-making, social inclusion, communities and building community resilience from the Strategy.

**Recommendation 11:** State Government to investigate and advocate for longer-term tenure options in the private rental market.

Shelter is pleased that Housing SA acknowledges the strong links between housing and health and that they work closely with mental health, but would like to see closer links with Health SA, especially with Health SA Aboriginal staff, to specifically work on Aboriginal housing and health policies and services.

**Recommendation 12:** Housing SA to place greater emphasis on working more closely with Health SA, specifically on Aboriginal policy and service issues with a greater focus on client outcomes.

## Section 3 - Needs

Participants in Shelter SA's consumer consultation talked in-depth about their housing needs and wants and much emphasis is placed on "needs" in the Strategy. People living in poverty however, rarely have control or choice about where they live or opportunities to contribute to ideas about how to achieve social justice or equality. This power is commonly affected by structural factors and lack of power is one of the major consequences of poverty (Ife, 2001). An empowerment model seeks to maximise effective choices and to increase power in other areas (Ife, 2001). Needs should be determined and defined by the people experiencing them, not by so-called "experts" as is often the case in policy work that does not involve target groups in decision-making or in the design and delivery of activities. Ensuring that community members have some power over ideas is also important in maintaining or challenging dominant discourses and practices. Discriminatory and insensitive approaches by individuals, groups, institutions or human service providers can compound oppression and social problems, rendering invisible the needs of people who routinely experience oppression in the course of living their daily lives (Clark, 2008). It is unclear who is defining the needs discussed in the Strategy or what assumptions are made about values. The way that Shelter consumer participants talked about their needs and wants was very different to the way needs are defined in the literature, understood by large institutions and expressed in policy documents. It is stated in the Strategy that "we want to listen and better understand their needs (single households and people living with disabilities)" so a transparent process that demonstrates how the needs of South Australians will be incorporated in planning and delivering houses and services is required. Working with private and not for profit providers to meet the needs of South Australians will require a detailed understanding of needs expressed by those they are aimed to meet.

**Recommendation 13:** State Government to demonstrate how the needs of South Australians, from the consumer perspective, will be identified, defined and incorporated into the Strategy, utilising evidence-based models, such the empowerment model described by Ife in 2002.

### Specific needs

It is pleasing that people with disabilities, young people, older people and unemployed people are mentioned in the Strategy, but more detail about the specific needs of vulnerable groups is required. The following information has been gathered from Shelter SA members and non-members who wished to have input into the Shelter SA submission, about the specific needs of disadvantaged groups of people from their perspectives.

### Youth Affairs Council of South Australia (YACSA)

The provision of appropriate, stable, affordable and safe housing options is a basic requirement of ensuring young people's social participation, health and wellbeing. Without stable accommodation, young people face a range of significant disadvantages, including reduced access to income support, the additional financial strain associated with moving house often, an increased likelihood of developing or exacerbating physical and/or mental health issues, and less opportunity to access training, education and employment options.

**Recommendation 14:** State Government to expand all programs, projects or initiatives that make it easier for young people and the vulnerable members of our community to access housing options, recognising that they may need support to participate in the new system (Access Project).

**Recommendation 15:** State Government to explore and introduce incentives for landlords to rent to young people and increase public awareness to combat discrimination.

It is agreed that the assertions in the Strategy that young people face difficulties accessing housing owing to lower incomes, low amounts of savings, insecure employment, debts associated with study and little or no private rental tenancy history<sup>2</sup> are correct. In addition to these difficulties, many landlords make negative assumptions about young people's lifestyles, while estate agents frequently question young people's ability to meet rental obligations. This is especially concerning given that such difficulties often occur only because of the young person's age.

**Recommendation 16:** State Government to elaborate on the difficulties young people face and include solutions for overcoming them in conjunction with YACSA.

It is acknowledged in the Strategy that young people at risk need special care and support that goes beyond housing provision but there is no explanation of how Housing SA will work with other government and non-government services to ensure this comprehensive support will be provided.

**Recommendation 17:** Housing SA to articulate how they will work with government and non-government services to ensure comprehensive support for young people at risk.

It is stated in the Strategy that a review of the legislation that regulates the private rental market (the *Residential Tenancies Act 1995*) is currently underway, with reforms proposed to improve the protections available to private tenants<sup>3</sup>. The improvement of such protections is especially pressing when it comes to young people living in shared housing arrangements. The *Residential Tenancies Act* currently provides no protection for housemates who are not named on a property's lease, meaning young people may risk being left with bad tenancy records or debts incurred by a previous housemate. This can be a significant disincentive for young people who are homeless or at risk of homelessness to access shared housing services. For example, figures from the Service to Youth Council's Get-A-Place program show that of the 2350 young people who requested support from July 2009 to October 2011, only 9% were interested in shared housing. Increased protections for young people sharing houses would be particularly positive in the case of young people whose financial situation means other types of private housing are inaccessible. The increased connection to peer support that may be available in a share-house environment would also be beneficial to young people's social and financial wellbeing. Young people who share accommodation however, are potentially exposing themselves to increased risk of eviction without cause/notice, loss/damage to possessions and compromises to their physical safety.

**Recommendation 18:** State Government to change the RTA to improve the protections available to young people sharing houses to encourage more young people to take up this option.

**Recommendation 19:** State Government to fund educational activities that increase young people's knowledge about how to safely share accommodation and to consider training and employing young people as peer-educators.

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<sup>2</sup> P.20

<sup>3</sup> P.44

## **SACOSS Policy Council Members**

At the November SACOSS Policy Council meeting, members were invited to discuss the Strategy and provide input to the Shelter SA green paper submission. Not all participants answered every question and the verbatim records are included at Appendix 1. The discussion highlighted the way that people think and talk about housing for their client groups and should be taken into consideration in the implementation of the final Strategy. The practical and detailed issues recorded by policy council members need to be taken into account in the development and implementation of any new policies. Topics that were discussed by Policy Council members resonated with the themes of Shelter SA's consumer participatory voting activity. The SACOSS Policy Council members are an established group with distinct links to clients and their target groups who meet regularly to discuss issues that are important to not-for-profit organisations. The Policy Council is well-placed to contribute to State Government policy development and implementation, particularly the specific needs of disadvantaged groups in the formation of the final Strategy.

**Recommendation 20:** State Government to engage with SACOSS Policy Council on a regular basis to seek advice about the specific needs of disadvantaged groups, evidence-based articulation of those needs and the development and implementation of policy.

## **Agencies Supporting Housing for Refugees and Asylum Seekers (ASHRA)**

As a signatory to the Refugee Convention, Australia has an obligation to provide protection to people fleeing persecution and violence who have sought protection in Australia. This protection is provided under Australia's Humanitarian program, which granted 13,799 visas<sup>4</sup> in 2010-2011 (Department of Immigration and Citizenship, 2011).

ASHRA is composed of South Australian service providers and Shelter SA supports them to work together to address and improve the housing situation of refugees and asylum seekers, who experience a range of issues distinct from other vulnerable groups. Refugees who settle in South Australia face a housing market where public housing stock is being systematically reduced and they are compelled to compete in the private rental market often without a rental history or rental references with added barriers around language and culture (see Beer and Foley, 2003). The politicisation of Australia's responsibility to protect refugees and asylum seekers has contributed to negative stereotypes and experiences and contributes to marginalisation and disadvantage in their attempts to access the private rental market. These are critical issues that need to be addressed in creating better housing outcomes for refugees and asylum seekers.

At the November meeting of the ASHRA branch, members were invited to discuss the Strategy and provide input to the Shelter SA submission. ASHRA members identified the key concerns in housing refugees and asylum seekers. Support and advocacy are needed for refugees and asylum seekers to access and maintain appropriate and affordable tenancies. ASHRA members said that budgeting and financial assistance are

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<sup>4</sup> Refugee visas – 5,211; In-country Special Humanitarian visas – 26; Emergency Rescue visas – 2; Woman at Risk visas – 759; Global Special Humanitarian visas – 2,981; Protection visas – 4,818; Resolution of Status visas – 2 (Department of Immigration and Citizenship, 2011).

particularly required to assist refugees and asylum seekers to maintain their tenancies as they may not understand western ideas and norms. Improved tenancy education is also needed to inform refugees and asylum seekers of services that can assist them to maintain their tenancies.

**Recommendation 21:** State government to continue to fund *and* expand the private rental liaison officer program with particular training for workers to interact with refugees and asylum seekers.

**Recommendation 22:** State government to reinstate formerly de-funded financial counsellor positions in the not-for-profit sector, specifically to advise refugees and asylum seekers on maintaining their tenancies.

**Recommendation 23:** Shelter to work more closely with Consumer and Business Services on their tenant education and develop relationships with property managers and landlords, introducing responses to key triggers that indicate a tenancy might be failing to avoid evictions.

**Recommendation 24:** Consumer and Business Services to consider abolishing initial \$30 RTT application fee for people on low incomes.

South Australian houses are predominantly constructed based on a Western, nuclear family model. Refugees and asylum seekers require a range of different housing options including one-roomed apartments for those living in Australia alone, as well as larger homes for big or composite families. Housing is required that is accessible to infrastructure and other supports such as English classes. For many people from culturally and linguistically-diverse (CALD) backgrounds a sense of security and ownership is an essential part of feeling at home and making a life in Australia. CALD consumer consultation participants talked about the importance of owning a home, understanding what their longer term financial commitments are and working towards a goal of securing a place to call home. With more secure tenure, they said that families are free to organise themselves and how they live, even mentioning not being able to garden as they wished and having to adhere to rigid rules about having a lawn and mowing it every two weeks. Increasing options for home ownership and secure leases with some freedom for action within the property are very important to this group of people and their families.

**Recommendation 25:** Shelter SA recognises that housing different-sized families is not as simple as building smaller or bigger homes and will contribute to researching solutions for this issue and advise the Minister for Social Housing of the outcome.

**Recommendation 26:** Shelter SA to work with Consumer and Business Services to investigate flexible tenancy options that include longer-term leasing options.

**Recommendation 27:** State Government to develop low cost home ownership schemes for people who receive a Centrelink benefit as their only source of income.

Refugees and asylum seekers often do not have a rental history or rent references and this is a barrier to accessing private rental properties. They may also enter into leases for private rental properties that are not affordable to them in the long term because they are desperate to find a place to live and ultimately default on their rent resulting in eviction. In addition to leading to homelessness, this is problematic when they try to access subsequent accommodation. Moving to more affordable accommodation in areas

around the fringes of Adelaide or in the country may result in disconnection from family and cultural groups and difficulties in accessing services, education and employment and therefore presents another barrier for people in realising their potential.

A case study that includes information provided by a participant in Shelter's consumer consultation illustrates issues around house size, language barriers, where people live, the cost of transport (especially owning and maintaining a car), looking for work and the costs of living. Importantly it points to the distress the person felt about "living on taxpayers' money" and insecurity about the short length of tenure – both weighed heavily upon the participant:

"Housing is a very important issue for refugees" Sanjev says, "A place to call home is still a distant dream for us". Sanjev is a refugee who has been resettled in Australia under the humanitarian settlement program. Sanjev explains that he wants to study and so would like to live in the city close to the University, but his parents face a language barrier and so prefer to live amongst their community where they feel more connected. Sanjev is looking for work but recounts that many jobs require a car and license, the latter of which he obtained but, "Virtually all of my savings have gone for that, I can't afford the car to get the work".

**Recommendation 28:** State Government to clearly articulate and include the specific needs of low income and disadvantaged people, especially refugees and asylum seekers from their perspective, in the Strategy.

## Section 4 – Assumptions and Misleading Language

The “Building on our Successes” title used in the Strategy is not appropriate for activities and programs that are still in the planning stages and have not yet been implemented. An example of the inappropriateness of the title of this section in the Strategy is that under the heading of homelessness, a statement is made that there has been a 50% reduction in the number of rough sleepers in the inner city. Shelter SA requests that this figure be removed from the Strategy because it has already been established that the methodology used in this research does not adequately describe the total population of rough sleepers or the reasons why people did not wish to participate in the survey. Anecdotally, people accessing homeless services find the experience of participating in the survey degrading. The community needs to challenge claims like the ones made by the Social Inclusion Board about “successfully counting rough sleeping to support better planning for and delivery of services” and that “we’ve halved the number of people sleeping rough on Adelaide’s streets”.

**Recommendation 29:** State Government to rename this section of the Strategy and clearly delineate what has been achieved, whether or not programs have undergone a high quality evaluation with publicly available results and what is still in the planning stages.

**Recommendation 30:** State Government to remove all references to halving the number of rough sleepers in the inner city from the Strategy and government websites.

**Recommendation 31:** State Government to cease conducting the Street Count survey unless the ethics around the way it is administered and reported are reviewed and changes implemented.

A focus on counting people and current ways of collecting data about the performance of homelessness agencies does not provide information about the **need** for services or the **quality** of the services being provided. Shelter’s consultation of members and non-members in 2011, recorded participants talking about more reliable ways of evaluating services and deciding on funding than surveys like the street count. The government’s Homeless 2 Home (H2H) system relies on people presenting for assistance and support but does not have the capacity to accurately measure need or reflect the other complexities involved in accessing support and accommodation from the client perspective.

A 2011 Australian Housing and Urban Research Institute paper “Evidence for improving access to homelessness services” released in July (Australian Housing and Urban Research Institute, 2011a) for example, reports that homeless people face significant barriers to accessing services, often homelessness services have low visibility in the community and there is a general lack of knowledge about what services are available and how to contact them.

The “no wrong door” service delivery model utilised by homelessness service providers can create significant complexity and logistical barriers for clients. While the intention of the model is for clients to receive appropriate referrals from their initial point of contact, the actual client experience is generally one of confusion and exclusion. Additionally, when clients do manage to approach services they felt unwelcome when they are “turned away” or contact does not lead to the provision of appropriate assistance.

**Recommendation 32:** State Government to work towards increasing public awareness of how to access homelessness services and counter negative experiences of accessing emergency assistance.

**Recommendation 33:** Instead of comparing inputs to outputs (funding versus numbers of clients), State Government must compare inputs to need AND outputs to outcomes, to measure quality and the impact of services on clients. For example, when a service has been accessed by a homeless person there are often no further details about whether that led to an appropriate intervention or other outcomes for the client.

**Recommendation 34:** State Government to develop research funding applications to access funding (separate from that allocated to homelessness services) to measure outcomes and the quality of services being delivered, according to clients.

Service provision participants in the Shelter consultation during 2011 talked about the heavy administrative requirements that take workers away from their day to day activities with homeless people. When agencies receive funding from numerous sources, each funding provider has different requirements as to data that is collected. The complexity of homeless client issues means that some agencies have to access numerous sources of funding. The time needed to collect and enter client data takes workers away from direct client work.

**Recommendation 35:** State Government to consult homelessness service providers to examine how to reduce the impact of data entry requirements on direct service provision and make changes accordingly.

Shelter consultation participants also talked about the competitive tendering process in terms of the amount of resources needed to prepare consultations and how these cause a sense of division amongst homelessness agencies, despite rhetoric of collaboration. Despite strict quality assurance processes, many participants said that the tendering requirements double up on work that has already been done. Short funding periods do not allow agencies to plan for the future with a developmental focus.

**Recommendation 36:** State Government review and refine its competitive tendering process to allow agencies to work together and foster collaboration for the benefit of clients.

The 2011 Shelter consultation participants also flagged that a lack of housing is a critical issue, especially emergency accommodation, that affects the capacity of homelessness services to respond appropriately to crisis situations. Participants talked about urgently needing better ways to provide crisis accommodation and this finding is confirmed by figures from the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, 2010) that indicate Nationally, despite the large number of homelessness agencies providing accommodation services, only 33% of support periods involved access to accommodation with the majority of clients receiving only support. In terms of need, these figures indicate there is a high level of unmet need for accommodation and suggests that the majority of people experiencing homelessness are not being directly assisted with supported accommodation.

**Recommendation 37:** State Government to develop research funding applications, in conjunction with Shelter, to access research funding to measure and address unmet need.

In the “opportunities and drivers of change” section of the Strategy, the projected increases in the State’s population were of particular concern to the Shelter SA consumer participants, noting the existing population and competition for scarce resources, including housing. Participants had a discussion about this and other assumptions that are made in the Strategy being unquestioned as positive directions for South Australia.

**Recommendation 38:** State Government to clearly explain and justify the assumption that large increases in the population of South Australia will benefit citizens when resources are already scarce.

**Recommendation 39:** State Government to articulate their plans for managing scarce resources in the future, to reassure all South Australians, that all will have access to basic needs including housing and employment and the impact on the environment will be sustainable.

The reasons provided in the Strategy for the increase in housing that is not affordable are “financial markets, demand patterns, and a lack of housing supply and costs”. The term “housing prices” is used in the Strategy and when it is predominantly the price of land that has increased rather than the cost of building a house, clear delineation is required as this has implications for the provision of affordable housing for consumers, government and non-government organisations, tax arrangements and how governments utilise land. It must be made clear that increases in the cost of land make housing unaffordable as well as financial markets, in order to flag the impact of tax and other incentives for landlords and investors and opportunities to use land (including Government owned land) in innovative ways.

**Recommendation 40:** State Government to clarify and define the use of the terms “housing supply and costs” when discussing housing affordability.

**Recommendation 41:** A clear definition of the term “housing prices” to reflect the increase in land costs and implications for government policy, planning and spending in the Strategy.

## Section 5 - "Directions" Critique

### Direction 1 - Creating sustainable neighbourhoods and communities

The terms "communities" and "neighbourhoods" are used again in this section without any/adequate definition. While sustainable communities are defined as being resilient to change, it is argued that some communities **need** to change to improve. Previously within the Strategy, it is stated that government aims to develop communities, implying that communities must change, a contradiction in terms. Communities are naturally divisive and exclusionary. To define sustainable neighbourhoods as being "inclusive of all people" significant work will need to be undertaken that invests resources in addressing diversity and difference amongst the people who live in the same geographic area. Environments that encourage "social inclusion" do not occur naturally. A focus on transit oriented developments (TODs) is important for those who do not live near to their place of work, however there are other important preferences and priorities that consumers place on deciding where they live, and these should be recognised in the Strategy. The way that TODs are discussed in the Strategy contains an assumption about social and economic participation that is premised on employment as the only way to contribute to society. It must be recognised in the Strategy that constructing TODs will not necessarily alleviate social problems that are presumed to occur because people do not fulfill a standard and mainstream ideal of social and economic participation. Disadvantage, discrimination, social problems and fractured communities have far more complex causes than can be solved by locating people near public transport.

**Recommendation 42:** Shelter supports expanded public transport and infrastructure but sees transport as a necessity of life rather than simply a means of travelling to employment.

**Recommendation 43:** State Government to make peak **and** off-peak travel free for seniors and **all** Centrelink customers.

### Direction 2 - Building capacity of the housing industry, including the not for profit sector to provide affordable housing

The preferred growth provider process increased the capacity and expectation of some not-for profit agencies to grow their housing portfolios however, there is little commitment to funding or direction in the Strategy about growth, except for some opportunities for "sophisticated" organisations. Smaller and medium size community housing organisations deliver specific services to niche groups and these should not be excluded from future housing planning.

**Recommendation 44:** Ministers Conlon and Hunter to explore mechanisms that allow not-for-profit organisations to grow their housing stock including the release of debentured stock, stock transfer, direct funding and the provision of land for the benefit of all South Australian's and this intent is clearly reflected in the Strategy.

**Recommendation 45:** State government articulate their plans for all preferred growth providers, community housing associations and cooperatives.

Concerns have been raised in other states and territories about what happens to public housing tenants, in particular their rights and responsibilities, when stock transfers take place and this is an important area for consideration.

**Recommendation 46:** State Government to develop and adopt a protocol as described by Darcy and Stringfellow (Darcy, 2000) to ensure that tenant rights are upheld during any transfer process.

### **Direction 3 - Facilitating more affordable and high needs housing opportunities**

Of all South Australians deemed to be living in housing stress (using current measures), 68% receive Commonwealth Rent Assistance. The Australian Council of Social Service, academics and economists are calling upon the Commonwealth Government to increase income support allowances as recommended by the Henry Review. Professor Ian Harper who chaired the Fair Pay Commission set up under the Howard Coalition Government has warned that “giving people so little to survive on is causing desperation and depression”. Shelter SA realises that housing costs and the increased costs of living mean that basic needs are not met and that people will never “reach their potential” living in such poverty. For low income and disadvantaged people, especially those who rely solely on Centrelink income, the increased costs of living that include utilities (electricity, gas, water) and food alone mean that definitions of affordable housing and housing stress are no longer applicable. The costs of housing and increased costs of living leave some consumers will inadequate income to meet their basic needs such as healthcare, transport, insurance, emergency funds and clothing.

### **Shelter Consumer Consultation: Local Lifeworlds & Affordability**

The Strategy talks about addressing affordable housing, the definition of which rests on a measure of 30% of income paid on rent or mortgage. Using the 30% measure of affordability as a benchmark, we asked participants to calculate the percentage of their income that they spend on rent. Overall participants were paying between 30% (only one Housing SA tenant) to 50% (remaining participants) of their income on rent or mortgage, but when asked to include utility and food expenses this measure increased to 50% to 60%, with one person reporting that they were paying 86% of their income on the combined expenses of rent, utilities and food. One Housing SA tenant was paying 50% of her income in rent. Researchers asked this participant the reason why she was paying 50% of her income to Housing SA as rent. The participant said that it was something to do with the person she was sharing her house with, who had been assessed as receiving a Centrelink payment, but was not directly receiving the payment. Researchers encouraged the participant several times to talk with her worker about this situation and to attend at Housing SA to address the matter. The participant said that she was reluctant to go to Housing SA because it would “just cause trouble”. Housing stress was acutely experienced by one participant as follows:

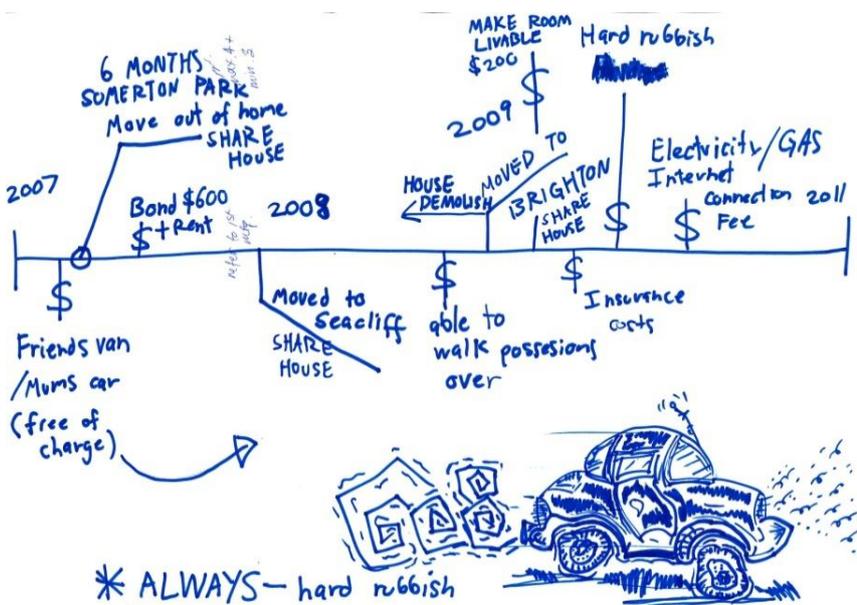
“I’ve seen the cost of living go up drastically, it’s really hard to live”. Brian says that the increased cost of utilities leaves him with \$160 a fortnight to buy food and anything else he might need, “I don’t have luxury stuff - alcohol or cool drink. You can go three days without anything but a tub of butter and a slice of bread”. Brian has second-hand appliances that he turns off to save money because he has less opportunity to access energy-efficient appliances that will save him money in the long-run. Brian needs a \$2,000 operation, but said “how the hell am I going to get that?! No medical cover, can’t afford it, so I’ll have to borrow it, but then I can’t eat”.

An AHURI paper has described the basis of the 30% measure of affordability and questioned the rationale for its use:

How can one account for the existence and persistence of the fixed ratio or percentage of income affordability concept? Apart from its mathematical simplicity, the rationale for the conventional standard, and the rationalisation for raising the acceptable level in the US from 25 per cent to 30 per cent in the 1980s, and in Australia and other countries since then, has been built upon interpretations of empirical studies of what households actually spend for housing. Because ratios are pure numbers, they can be compared across time and space and thus are susceptible to being reified as universal and lawful. Such 'laws' then become legitimated as appropriate indicators and the basis for normative standards.

(Stone et al., 2011:20)

The 30% measure of affordability does not account for different types of households having different expenditure requirements (Burke et al., 2011), and thus what is "affordable" will vary for different people. A number of participants support dependents and larger families, three participants had a disability and another three participants support children with disabilities. These participants potentially experience added costs that are not accounted for in the 30% affordability measure. Alternative measures of affordability, such as the residual income method (Burke et al, 2011; Stone et al, 2011) may prove a more equitable means of defining affordability. This confirms the need to rethink current affordability measures.



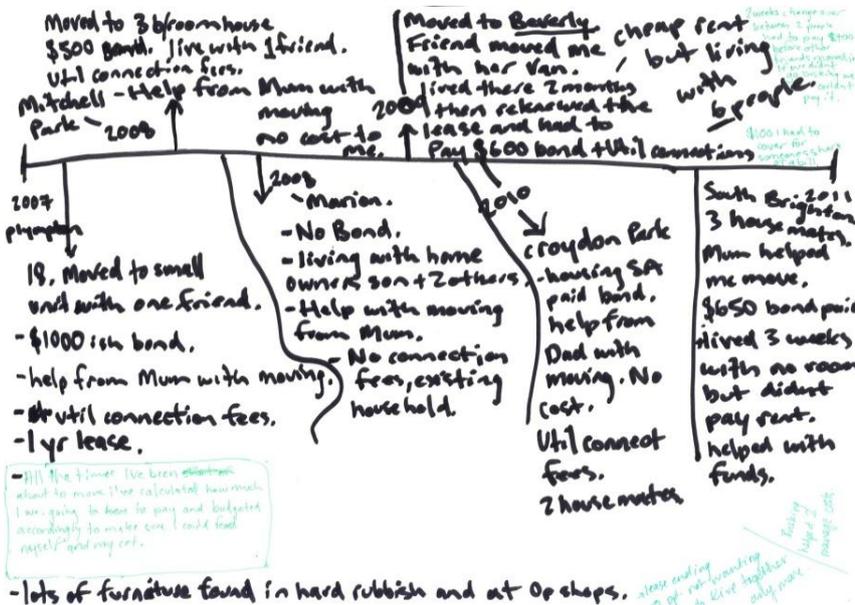
Based on previous focus groups in which participants talked about insecure tenancies in the private rental market and moving many times, a participatory timeline technique was adopted to uncover indirect financial consequences of moving that add to the burden of affordability. The timeline activity was undertaken on a large sheet of paper with a line drawn in the centre. The line represents the participants' housing career and a baseline to mark when they had moved and what it had cost them.

Through the timeline activity a number of participants showed that they had moved several times; one participant had moved three times in one year, another had moved six times in five years, a third had moved four times in as many years. Reasons for moving varied but often had personal and financial consequences, as the story below illustrates:

Donna has had to move a number of times with her young family to try and secure appropriate, safe and affordable accommodation. Her children have had to change schools numerous times and have disabilities and struggle with frequent change, “they don’t like strange people and can’t be looked after by others”. “We move every Christmas,” Donna says, “so the kids think we have to pack the boxes with presents and move”. Moving poses a significant financial burden as well, “We are spending two to three grand when moving” Donna says.

Overall, the most common financial costs of moving were discussed as utility and phone connection and disconnection fees, bond and rent in advance, van hire or fuel for friends, furniture, fixtures and household items, storage and higher cost of food while moving. Respondents said that they have had to leave things behind and buy them again later and when sharing accommodation have, at times, been left with bills.

This highlights that affordability relates to more than the cost of rent and that insecure tenancies



and violent and unsafe places can contribute to other financial and personal costs. Housing then, can be seen as a multi-dimensional problem linked to health, safety, quality of housing and affordability, as participants highlighted when voting on what they valued in where they live. The provision of appropriate, affordable, secure and safe housing needs to be recognised as a fundamental basis for South Australians to realise their potential.

The timeline activity also revealed generational differences in how participants commenced their housing careers. Older participants spoke about their experiences of leaving home, often with assistance from their parents. For younger participants home ownership was not mentioned at all, indicating that the high cost of land and housing has altered the ways in which people get a start in life and how and where they live. Some older participants spoke regretfully about relinquishing former owned properties as entering the property market nowadays is too expensive. Middle-aged participants had given up on owning a home as hopeless, indicating that home ownership is no longer a key aspiration implicit to the discourse of “the great Australian dream”.

**Recommendation 47:** State government to advocate to the Commonwealth for an increase in Commonwealth Rent Assistance and Newstart, Parenting Payment Single and Youth Allowance payments.

**Recommendation 48:** State Government to investigate and implement an alternative, evidence-based definition of affordable housing and housing stress such as the Residual Income Approach (see Burke et al., 2011), that better takes into account increases in the cost of living.

**Recommendation 49:** State Government to increase the amount of financial assistance they provide for bond and rent to include an extra payment to contribute to the costs of moving.

#### **Supported Residential Facilities**

In 2003, the South Australian State Government reported that SRF's were not meeting the needs of hundreds of the most vulnerable South Australians, on any level and it is unclear what has changed for SRF residents who seem to be a group of people who are rendered "invisible" in society. Some residents are eligible to receive a couple of hours support from non-government support providers, however problems identified years ago have still not been addressed in the sector. A major project in the Supported Residential Facility sector was undertaken ten years ago, where the project officer visited every SRF in South Australia, talking with residents about their rights and responsibilities under the SRF Act. In 2004, the same project officer completed a policy analysis of SRF legislation and its implementation, finding that recovery is inhibited in the SRF environment, the model does not have the capacity to provide quality care, support or appropriate accommodation for people with disabilities and that the legislation impacts negatively on residents (Clark, 2004). It is disgraceful that little has changed for SRF residents in the last ten years and that SRFs continue to fail to meet a range of disability standards which are in place for other vulnerable people in the community. State Government must monitor the facilities (as in other States) rather than local government environmental health officers, who are unable to effect change. There are fewer SRFs and it is not known where the former residents now live, they are potentially adding to the chronic homeless population where we see an increased demand for services. SRF residents pay 79% of their income in rent, which is very long way from the definition of spending 30% of income on rent or mortgage, known to cause "housing stress". It is not known if all fire alarms are monitored in the SRFs in South Australia and fire safety is a pressing concern. The model utilised in the sector of large group homes and minimal support, is inadequate and inappropriate for the 860 South Australians currently housed.

**Recommendation 50:** State Government to re-house SRF residents using more appropriate models (such as small group homes that are run by not-for-profit providers, with intensive support (as in Winteringham model) and that existing SRFs be systematically closed down and residents provided intensive support to transition into more appropriate, supported housing.

**Recommendation 51:** Until such time that SRFs can be closed, State Government to take responsibility for monitoring facilities and enforcing the SRF Act.

**Recommendation 52:** That State Government subsidise SRF residents' rent so that they are only paying 25% of their income until such time as the SRF model is no longer in use.

**Recommendation 53:** State Government to address fire safety issues in SRFs as a matter of urgency.

#### **Direction 4 - Improving housing outcomes for Aboriginal South Australians**

Aboriginal people have specific housing needs and face particular barriers to accessing and maintaining all forms of housing due to discrimination and racism. The material for this section of the submission to the Strategy is based on literature and research in the area of Aboriginal housing and a group activity conducted with the Shelter SA's Aboriginal Homelessness and Housing Support Branch to draw out their views on the Strategy and inform this submission.

Shelter SA's Aboriginal Branch members expressed concern that only two pages of the Strategy were dedicated to Aboriginal housing issues. Participants agreed that the statement below, from the Strategy, does not recognise that Aboriginal people will never have the same housing opportunities as others and fails to address the discrimination, racism and multiple disadvantage that Aboriginal people have historically and continue to confront in accessing housing and homelessness services. Stakeholders reported "service segregation", racism in private rental and in some housing and homelessness agencies as key blocks to accessing services. The current sentence in the Strategy is as follows:

*"South Australia is committed to improving housing outcomes for Aboriginal people, ensuring that Aboriginal people have the same housing opportunities (in relation to homelessness services, housing rental, housing purchase and access to housing through an efficient and responsive housing market) as other Australians".*

**Recommendation 54:** State Government to remove this sentence from the Strategy and replace it with the following sentence:

*"The South Australian government is committed to improving culturally appropriate housing options and outcomes for Aboriginal people through addressing the discrimination, racism and multiple disadvantage they face in accessing homelessness services and the private rental market. Specific programs will be developed to assist Aboriginal people to obtain private rental and create opportunities for home ownership".*

Participants said that the quote below from the Green Paper was irrelevant in terms of housing provision:

*"improve opportunities for Aboriginal people to participate in the workforce through short-medium term worker accommodation and training/linked to employment/trainee programs (which may lead to employment by Housing SA, or by other industries such as mining, construction, human service delivery)".*

**Recommendation 55:** State Government to remove this sentence from the Strategy and work with Aboriginal people to develop something more relevant to housing and employment.

Housing SA has a number of programs and procedures in place to ensure the cultural appropriateness of the services they provide including the Cultural Inclusion Framework, transitional housing outreach, three Senior Cultural Consultants, Private Rental Liaison Officers and other resources, and these are acknowledged as valuable approaches and services. There is an overwhelmingly large body of research in the area of Aboriginal housing and homelessness, some of which is accompanied by recommendations, indicators and solutions to overcome the problems that continue to occur for Aboriginal people. It is not

known why State Government does not engage with research such as AHURI's 2011 "Urban social housing for Aboriginal people and Torres Strait Islanders: respecting culture and adapting services" and base policies on it (Australian Housing and Urban Research Institute, 2011b) – see excerpt below:

#### **Principles of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Service Delivery**

Positive outcomes are more likely if general guiding principles such as the following are acknowledged and accepted:

- a. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are the first Australians, with unique cultures, languages and spiritual relationships to the land and seas.
- b. There is diversity and differences both within and between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures.
- c. The history of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people includes the effects of colonisation and dispossession on communities, families and individuals and these effects can be intergenerational and continue to impair the emotional and social wellbeing of many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.
- d. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander family relationships are strong and kinship obligations are an interwoven part of Indigenous people's cultural identity.
- e. Respect for Elders is an important aspect of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures and Traditional Elders play a significant role within Aboriginal communities.
- f. An understanding of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander local protocols is essential in the delivery and acceptance of a service program and culturally valid understandings must shape the provision of services.
- g. Valid service delivery accurately reflects the preferences, obligations and aspirations of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and therefore self-determination is central to service provision for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities.
- h. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people seek and expect a holistic approach to service delivery.
- i. Effective service delivery to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people will seek to meet their most pressing need for assistance in a timely and practical manner.

These principles suggest a number of appropriate service delivery strategies:

- a. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations with a mix of male and female Indigenous and non Indigenous workers are generally best placed to deliver services to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities and individuals.
- b. Full consultation and the development of equal partnerships are important components of successful service delivery planning.
- c. Employment, appropriate ongoing support and training opportunity for Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander workers are important components of capacity building in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities.
- d. Local cultural awareness training is essential for non Indigenous workers providing services

to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities or individuals.

- e. Training for all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander workers in understanding the complexity of another culture's health concerns and the difficulty of belonging and adjusting to two different cultural contexts and how this has led to particular mental health concerns for some.
- f. Flexible service delivery, addressing the immediate needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander clients should be the norm.
- g. A well resourced, whole of government, cross program approach to service delivery in partnership with Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander community organisations and employing local Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander people is the preferred model of service delivery to Indigenous Australians.

The national consultation found that these principles were welcomed as a relevant and valuable reflection of people's own experience of effective ways of working.

### **Barriers to effective translation of the principles into practice**

The national consultation primarily focused on the significant gaps experienced between the expression of good practice in various documents and guidelines and the daily reality of service consumers and the frustrations experienced by service providers and by people in policy and planning roles. The barriers most commonly identified were individual and systemic racism; inadequate resources and investment; and bureaucracy.

#### **1. Racism as a barrier**

Stakeholders reported 'service segregation', racism in the private rental market, and racist people in some services as key blocks to accessing homelessness services and support.

The term 'service segregation' was used to describe a practice in some mainstream agencies of automatically referring people only to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander agencies and not facilitating access to mainstream services.

In all locations the private rental market was identified as a significant contributor to the homelessness problems of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in urban areas. Stakeholders reported that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are consistently discriminated against, directly and indirectly.

The issue of fair allocation of properties, both in public and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander housing organisations was raised throughout the consultation. The consultative approach taken in Tasmania, however, stood out positively from other States and Territories.

#### **2. Inadequate investment as a barrier**

The current level of investment response to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander homelessness was consistently raised as a key barrier to effective service delivery.

Funding arrangements were consistently reported to be inadequate to resource services to work in the ways described in the principles and strategies.

The needs of homeless families with young children were highlighted in the consultations, with particular reference to the large amount of resources required to respond to the needs of homeless families, who may be in unsuitable accommodation, living in public space, or have been housed and then require a great deal of follow-on support.

All States and Territories reported that demand for public housing continues to rise and was not being matched by the level of investment required to increase supply. The emphasis on rent assistance rather than funds directed at increasing the supply side was also identified as problematic, particularly for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people who have less access to the private rental market.

### **3. Bureaucracy as a barrier**

'The bureaucracy' was the most consistently identified barrier to translating agreed standards into practice across all consultation sites and stakeholder groups. Four specific aspects of 'bureaucracy' were highlighted as follows.

#### **Competitive tendering and related procurement processes**

The observation was made in all locations that the theme of cooperation that runs through the good practice elements and principles is in direct contradiction to the reality of the competitive tendering environment currently in place in all States and Territories. It was strongly felt that this environment reduces motivation to work collaboratively, setting services 'against each other', leading to further gaps in the service system or to a lack of interest in addressing gaps.

The annual funding cycles of many government agencies, including for long term programs, create a constant state of uncertainty that impact negatively on the recruitment and retention of skilled staff and exert pressure to have funding expended in unrealistic timeframes. Additionally, funding projects on a pilot basis has detrimental impacts when pilot projects that are evaluated as effective do not receive ongoing funding.

#### **Accountability and reporting: methods and burdens**

Accountability and compliance reporting was raised throughout the consultation as an ongoing cause of frustration because the time spent on these tasks equals time lost to service delivery, especially in small organisations, and because of a perceived lack of visible connection between reporting requirements and actual improvements to service delivery. In addition, standard reporting is often done by non-Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander officials who try to present the 'best story' which may set the agency up for failure since it can take many years for the goals of a service to be realised.

#### **Program design and guidelines**

There were many examples provided of the ways in which program design and guidelines become barriers to providing services that reflect the good practice principles. For example, guidelines which may not allow for the payment of Elders who support SAAP services through the provision of cultural advice and direct support to women and children in accommodation.

Government officers in all locations described how it was 'hard to work differently', citing accountability and the requirements around funding agreements with services as some of the barriers.

#### **Governance issues**

A number of people identified the governance of some Aboriginal owned organisations as a barrier to meeting the needs of local communities. The tension that was most commonly identified was that between kinship obligations and obligations to a broader community of people. Support in developing good governance was seen as central to growing effective organisations.

AHURI research about service integration and Indigenous housing (Australian Housing and Urban Research Institute, 2009) found that service delivery approaches are:

More likely to be successful for Indigenous clients involved face-to-face and personalised communication, flexible interpretation of policy, investment in relationship building and understanding of local cultural norms and lifestyles. These were at odds with current trends in mainstream service delivery that emphasise depersonalised (e.g. electronic) means of communication, reduced autonomy for front-line staff and standardisation of policies. It found there were particular problems faced by Indigenous people including inappropriate housing

allocations, rent setting policies that were complex and confusing, and instances where objectives of policies appeared to be contradictory. The social housing system was not responsive to Indigenous peoples' cultural needs such as accommodating long stay visitors.

Effective policy responses will require giving Indigenous communities a stronger voice in policy formulation and service planning. However, there was need to explore 'intercultural' approaches that involved both Indigenous and non-Indigenous organisations, use of adaptive policies and localised capacity. This may involve strengthening Indigenous run services, employing more indigenous staff in leadership roles within the mainstream service system, clarifying outcomes sought for Indigenous clients (e.g. around successful tenancies) and strengthening accountability frameworks for both mainstream and indigenous run service providers.

**Recommendation 56:** State Government to develop and implement evidence-based definitions and policies, particularly in the area of Aboriginal housing and homelessness, based on the FaHCSIA paper "Indigenous Homelessness in Australia" and AHURI research.

**Recommendation 57:** State Government to adhere to the principles as defined by FaHCSIA (as above) and work to overcome the known barriers to service implementation.

The size of Housing SA properties is often not suitable for Aboriginal families and one participant said that:

The housing offered is only based on a non-Aboriginal nuclear family model. Whilst they say Aboriginal people should have the same options for mainstream housing it doesn't necessarily work out that way.

**Recommendation 58:** State Government to ensure that when new public and community housing is built, it can accommodate some larger families.

Participants discussed the need for all government and non-government staff to undergo cultural training. One participant said that:

Many Aboriginal people don't feel comfortable talking to a non-Aboriginal Housing Officer and may not be able to communicate effectively and there is a fear they could be judged unfairly or discriminated against because of the lack of communication. Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal value systems and perceptions are, or seem, very different.

**Recommendation 59:** State Government to ensure that all government and non-government staff are trained in culturally appropriate communication skills and be accredited by an independent body such as Shelter SA.

Recent AHURI research into overcrowding for Aboriginal people in non-remote areas (Australian Housing and Urban Research Institute, 2010) indicates that:

Indigenous household overcrowding has a dual nature. On the one hand, overcrowding may occur when there is no way of allocating sleeping space without placing a person in situations that compromise the need for respect among kin. On the other hand, overcrowding might also occur where householders have chosen a lifestyle of substance abuse and the overcrowding results from the failure of rule-governed behaviour. These definitions of overcrowding are very different from the density model typically used by Australian public housing providers.

The Aboriginal Branch members agreed that overcrowding continues to be a serious issue for many people including people from the APY lands and needs to be addressed appropriately. Regarding families staying with Housing SA tenants and rent calculations, one participant said that:

If more people live in a house then the rent goes up, if people are there earning then the rent goes up. My daughter has her daughter living with her, Housing SA has swooped on them and the daughter has to pay since she's been there when her mother is trying to help her out

A second participant said that:

There needs to be real recognition of Aboriginal family culture and structure. You could have people visiting, but they might stay for 6 months. It's culturally expected – if you have something you have to share it

**Recommendation 60:** State Government to utilise an evidence-based definition of overcrowding as per the AHURI research report “Overcrowding for Indigenous households in non-remote areas”.

**Recommendation 61:** State government to explore how to allow for the lease-holding tenant to have families visit and stay for a period of time without significantly increasing rents to the lease-holder.

Participants agreed that it is difficult to qualify for Category 1 with Housing SA because you need lots of letters to support your application, such as from doctors and psychologists and often people who are really needy “fall through the gaps” because they do not access these types of services and if they do, are not able to obtain the paperwork that is needed without support.

**Recommendation 62:** State Government to support Aboriginal people in gathering information needed to qualify for public and community housing.

People relying on Centrelink payments as their only source of income are discriminated against in the private rental market. Negative stereotypes and racism add to the barriers that Aboriginal people experience when they are looking for rental accommodation.

**Recommendation 63:** Housing SA to employ more Aboriginal Private Rental Liaison officers as an urgent priority to overcome racism and negative stereotypes and assist Aboriginal people into private rental.

**Recommendation 64:** State Government to raise public awareness of discrimination and equal opportunity legislation amongst landlords and real estate agents.

Opportunities for Aboriginal home ownership are very limited and need to be improved. Most Aboriginal people who currently live in Housing SA properties cannot afford to buy these properties at current market value. One idea was that the Homestart Nunga Home Loan be re-developed to include a number of options that are more appropriate for Aboriginal people and their housing needs. Participants talked about home ownership for Aboriginal people and the idea of renting to own as follows:

- When it was the Housing Trust, if you had been in a home for a certain time there was a scheme that you could purchase that home for low cost over time. People should be supported sufficiently, given self-respect and then they are able to take pride in the house and know that it will be their kids home, they'll have something to leave their kids when they go.
- They did that for Maori people in New Zealand.
- They did that in the UK for council houses – people who were there for some time (in State housing) had the opportunity to buy houses for original market value.

**Recommendation 65:** Housing SA to work with Aboriginal people to develop a way to create equity in public and community housing that leads to home ownership.

Local Aboriginal participants understand that transitional housing is needed by people from the APY lands, but consider that there is a critical shortage of culturally appropriate emergency housing for both Aboriginal families and singles living in Adelaide.

**Recommendation 66:** State Government to work with Aboriginal community advisors (**independent of Government**) to develop an appropriate model for transitional and emergency accommodation that takes family size into consideration with a view to providing more culturally appropriate accommodation as an urgent priority.

As part of Housing SA's Cultural Inclusion Framework, it is intended that a Cultural Inclusion Committee is to be formed. The Shelter Aboriginal Branch would like to see an **independent** Aboriginal committee formed, who regularly communicate with community members, to advise Housing SA on Aboriginal issues, cultural values and concerns to ensure that policies and procedures are relevant, helpful, appropriate and endorsed by the community. One participant said that:

It would be helpful if Housing SA consulted an advocacy service comprised of a group of independent Aboriginal community members. If information comes from an independent point of view, it will provide an unbiased point of view. I know they have a committee but they are not in contact with the community so they community hears or knows nothing.

**Recommendation 67:** Housing SA to facilitate a group of Aboriginal people (**independent of Government**) who have appropriate community knowledge and connections to advise Housing SA on Aboriginal housing issues and needs. The membership of the group should be selected and endorsed by the Aboriginal people living in South Australia.

Since the Aboriginal Housing Authority was dismantled, it is not known if any work has been done to explore how tenants are faring under mainstream public housing services.

**Recommendation 68:** State Government to plan and fund a research program that systematically seeks the views of Aboriginal people, previously housed under AHA, as to how they are faring under mainstream services.

Australian Housing and Urban Research Institute research conducted this year describes the move by the Victorian government in partnership with the Aboriginal community to establish a viable and sustainable Aboriginal housing service to operate alongside the mainstream housing system, is hailed as one of the most significant initiatives included in their research titled "Urban social housing for Aboriginal people and Torres Strait Islanders: respecting culture and adapting services", which also contains criteria and indicators for social housing for Aboriginal people, which Shelter recommends should also be adopted. Shelter has already asked the new Minister for Social Housing, Ian Hunter, to champion the formation of the Association. Commenting about the lack of an Aboriginal led housing authority, one Aboriginal Branch participant said that:

Why don't they give the Aboriginal properties back to Aboriginal people and let them manage them themselves. For example establish Aboriginal Co-ops. If Aboriginal people were managing their own programs then they could evict people themselves and make their own decisions.

**Recommendation 69:** State Government to facilitate the creation of an Aboriginal Housing Association, managed by Aboriginal people, to manage ex-Aboriginal Housing Authority properties and tenants, with appropriate governance and accreditation.

**Recommendation 70:** If any public housing stock is to be transferred to not for profit organisations, State Government to identify the properties previously allocated to the ex-Aboriginal Housing Authority and transfer them to the new Aboriginal Housing Association (as recommended above), to ensure there is potential for growth, sustainability and adequate maintenance and upgrade of existing stock specifically for Aboriginal people.

### **Direction 5 - Improving the way people access and are supported in housing**

During the Housing SA consultation the new model for receiving information about housing options was called the “Access Project”. It is unclear why, in the Strategy, an alternative term is used to describe this work, the “Ask Just Once reforms”. Moving towards a new model for people to find out about the housing options open to them must take the needs of disadvantaged people into account. While the process will be more widely available and make use of technology, there are specific groups of people who will potentially be further disadvantaged in accessing housing information including people who do not speak/read English, have physical/mental health issues, culturally and linguistically diverse people and those who require support to present for housing assistance or advocacy to receive support, older people who are not familiar with information technology and younger people who may not fully understand the content of on-line information. Feedback from the Youth Affairs Council of SA, Shelter SA’s Aboriginal and Refugee branches and the Shelter SA board are reproduced here.

#### **Youth Affairs Council of South Australia**

Direction 5 of the Strategy is concerned with improving the way people access housing<sup>5</sup>. We understand this to be a reference to the Housing SA Access Project, which has at its core the aim of enabling consumers to access government services by using more on-line and self-service technologies<sup>6</sup>. While any initiative that increases coordination and cooperation within and between government departments and the non-profit sector is to be applauded, we have some concerns with the emphasis placed on online access points for registration with the system and setting up needs assessments, given that many young people do not have access to a computer or the internet. Though the consultation paper states that these access points will be available through Service SA centres, this does not cater for young people living in rural and remote South Australia, or who may be unable to travel. Furthermore, even young people who do have access to the internet and choose to utilise online access points may not fully understand the online content, or their specific entitlements and responsibilities, meaning face-to-face meetings and other forms of interaction will still be required.

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<sup>5</sup> P.43

<sup>6</sup> P.43

## **Shelter SA Branch - Agencies Supporting the Housing Needs of Refugees and Asylum Seekers (ASHRA)**

Consensus was reached by Shelter SA ASHRA members around a number of key issues arising from the Access Project consultation and these were conveyed to Housing SA. ASHRA members said that they were pleased that Housing SA conducted a consultation and that they were included, but asked how their input and issues will influence the project. People were unsure that raising issues now, would affect outcomes and implementation. Participants said that the proposed Access Project will send a strong message to their clients about the realities of accessing public housing and this may mean that people will not passively wait to be housed and will be more motivated and pro-active in exploring alternative options. Participants agreed that it is understandable to attempt to bring consistency to needs assessments and although the details have not yet been decided concerns were raised about an “objective needs assessment” process, especially for people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds. A variety of ways to access information about housing was seen as positive (call centre, internet, walk-in), but for people who cannot read or speak English, may be illiterate in their own language and who may not have easy access to a telephone or the internet, there are a number of potential barriers to receiving assistance and participants were interested to know what plans there are to overcome these issues. For example, are there any plans to translate material or use interpreter services? Members said that agencies involved in processing applications will require additional resources to participate in the access system as they are already working at full capacity.

## **Shelter SA Aboriginal Homelessness and Housing Support Branch**

Aboriginal people under-identify when applying for housing through HSA. Access to Confirmation of Aboriginality is difficult for some, especially those from interstate. While the Access Project has the potential to create a more integrated housing service, there are many people who don't access any services at all, people with disabilities, who experience language barriers and who have mental health issues who will not be served well by the Access Project as they are already so marginalised and isolated.

## **Key points arising from Housing SA consultation with Shelter SA Board members re the Access Project July 2011**

Participants said that self-assessment and self-identification are potential barriers for the types of high needs clients agencies work with. Housing providers would like to be able to continue to prioritise their own clients to ensure that personal relationships and local knowledge of people/circumstances are always taken into account during the allocation process. It is important to feedback to stakeholders participating in the consultation how tensions will be addressed in the final project implementation to avoid complaints that the issues raised by participants were not considered. Questions were asked about whether service providers will be able to trigger eligibility reviews and/or conduct them, as this would be an important part of the implementation. The Access Project will open the intake and assessment points for all forms of housing to a number of organisations (currently only intake point for public housing is Housing SA) which is

probably good for consumers - BUT organisations need to be resourced to do this appropriately. For example, housing providers are not funded to do waitlist intake and assessments in excess and it would be detrimental to service outcomes if staff resources had to be redirected from housing management to meet an increased volume. Effective strategies are needed to engage and inform all direct client services staff about the new Access Project system to ensure that high needs clients are not disadvantaged because staff do not know enough about how to access the system. There was a discussion about the qualifications of workers conducting assessments and “gate-keeping”, access to needs assessments and in relation to training and accreditation to use the system, two issues were put forward - there are large numbers of staff who will require training (450+ in some large organisations), and that a significant amount of training will be required to ensure that people have the required skills.

**Recommendation 71:** Housing SA to articulate how the potential barriers already identified by stakeholders will be overcome in the implementation of the Access Project.

**Recommendation 72:** State Government to articulate the alternative access mechanisms Housing SA intends to provide for people who are younger, older, living in rural and remote areas, from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds, with disabilities who do not/cannot utilise technology and all others who it is envisaged will require support to access the new system and cannot advocate for themselves.

**Recommendation 73:** Housing SA to ensure that an integral aspect of the training for workers using the Access Project system includes cultural competence training.

**Recommendation 74:** Housing SA to resource agencies that are required to participate in the Access Project implementation.

**Recommendation 75:** Housing SA to ensure that service providers and clients have input into the eligibility criteria and needs assessment content of the Access Project.

**Recommendation 76:** Housing SA to ensure a review policy and procedure will be in place for clients who feel they are eligible for a needs assessment but are categorised as not eligible, or if after undergoing a needs assessment are not categorised as being in highest need when the Access Project is implemented.

**Recommendation 77:** Housing SA to articulate how the Access Project will be monitored and evaluated, and information disseminated to the public.

**Recommendation 78:** Housing SA to monitor and evaluate the Access Project to ensure that it is culturally appropriate and inclusive of disadvantaged people and make the results publicly available.

**Recommendation 79:** Housing SA to improve processes around how people identify as Aboriginal to ensure they are culturally appropriate, within the Access Project.

**Recommendation 80:** Housing SA to articulate how Access Project training will be resourced and managed.

**Recommendation 81:** When clients are housed in transitional housing and begin to stabilise as they engage with support services, they are in effect becoming ineligible for public housing. Housing SA to address the eligibility of transitional housing tenants for public and community housing through the Access Project implementation.

**Recommendation 82:** Housing SA to negotiate with community housing providers so that they can retain allocation rights - make decisions about the most suitable properties for clients so that they can manage their portfolio and take tenant mix into account.

**Recommendation 83:** Housing SA to articulate how non-government agencies will be able to initiate and conduct reviews when the Access Project is implemented.

**Recommendation 84:** Housing SA to keep self-assessment and self-identification as concepts and how the project is implemented on the agenda during the implementation of the Access Project and especially when engaging stakeholders around the implementation process.

## Section 6

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## **Appendix 1: SACOSS Policy Council members' input – particular needs of low income and disadvantaged people**

### **Aboriginal people**

#### *3 main messages to government about housing:*

1. supply and maintenance of remote areas housing continues to be inadequate, the site of new homes does not reflect where people live (and hence is a form of social engineering), does not incorporate supply of essential housing assets (white goods, furniture, heating/cooling).
2. High levels of mobility of Aboriginal people impacts on housing for Aboriginal people in urban areas and this mobility may be forced eg when people need to relocate for renal dialysis
3. Housing for individuals and extended families is often inadequate.

#### *Key supports to access housing*

In accessing housing, the key supports needed are an increased supply of public and social housing, private rental reform including rental subsidies are needed and there is an unrealistic emphasis on home ownership as being the answer to the problem of Aboriginal housing

#### *Most important in living arrangements*

Most important things are choice in where you live, being near friends and family and does housing provide freedom to do what you need and want (no particular order)

### **Older people**

#### *3 main messages to government about housing:*

1. Separate water meters are needed for units
2. All power is electric so not paying two supply charges as usage is low, also not as dangerous as leaving stove on
3. Rent review to to increase rent after aged pension increases

#### *Key supports to access housing*

More public and social housing is needed to meet demand, private rental is not suitable for many older people, and rent to buy schemes are needed to making home ownership possible.

People need assistance to fill out rent review paperwork, easier transfer of tenancy when partner goes into a nursing home.

#### *Most important in living arrangements*

1. Safety
2. Be near family and friends
3. Health

### **Low income**

#### *3 main messages to government about housing*

1. Tighter credit control laws and more repayment options
2. Abolish exit fees on home loans
3. Broader access to community and emergency housing

4. Access to surplus income generated by the Residential Tenancies Fund

*Key supports needed to access housing*

More public and social housing is needed. Emergency assistance should not require people to leave their current accommodation. Home buying is not affordable for low income people.

*Key supports needed to maintain tenancies*

1. Very long term tenancies as found in the UK.
2. Access to emergency finances for temporary situations
3. Regular contact with support services

*Housing Affordability*

Many people are driven to crime or experience marriage breakdown due to housing stress. There is a significant cost flow on to the community as a consequence.

*Most important in living arrangements*

1. How long you can stay
2. Quality of housing and maintenance
3. Housing provides freedom to do what you want and meet your needs

*How to assist people to feel connected to where they live:*

Establishment of very long term tenancies and leases.

**Mental health issues**

*3 main messages to government about housing*

1. No exits from health services
2. Genuinely affordable options for people whose main income source is welfare
3. Support as needed

*Key supports to access housing*

1. Support to access and referral assistance needed for public and social housing
2. Support to gain and maintain employment needed to access private rental, in conjunction with reduced stigma
3. Employment is needed if people are to access home ownership

*Key supports needed to maintain tenancies*

Supportive landlord and options that work in terms of individual client needs

*Most important in living arrangements*

For people with mental illness it is support to get active and involved in their surroundings and there is a risk of this not happening for lonely, isolated people

*How to assist people to feel connected to where they live:*

Individual Psychosocial Rehabilitation and Support Services – delivered by non-government organisations funded by Health SA

*Any other comments regarding the Green Paper*

Supply issues are not addressed and the big picture around financial arrangements and stock are missing and not clear.

**Young people leaving Guardianship of the Minister (including young people with disabilities and mental health issues with high risk of homelessness)**

*3 main messages to government about housing*

1. Support hours need to accompany provision of housing after 18 years of age
2. Availability of “core and cluster” style housing for transition to independence services for young people 14 to 17 years of age
3. Needs to include accessibility features for young people with a disability

*Key supports needed to access housing*

All need support whether in social, public or private housing and housing suitable to needs

Financial training is needed AND low interest loans

*Key supports needed to maintain tenancies*

1. Ongoing support hours
2. Assistance into training or employment
3. Connection to local community

*Most important in living arrangements (no particular priority given, except top 3)*

1. Knowing neighbours
2. Safety
3. Being near friends or family

*How to assist people to feel connected to where they live:*

Support workers to link young people into mainstream interest groups and develop “natural networks”

*Would you like to comment on the homelessness reforms*

Seems like not much of the funding released by the Federal Government made its way into the non-government sector