



An Affordable Place to Live

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Introduction

Shelter SA is the peak body for housing in South Australia funded through the State Government's Housing Minister's Advisory Fund. Shelter SA is a member organisation and members consist of a diverse range of stakeholders including Government and non-government agencies, private industry and interested individuals. Shelter SA's brief is to advocate for policies and services that address housing affordability, especially for people on low incomes who may also be living with disadvantage, including people who are older, younger, Aboriginal, from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds and with physical or mental health issues. Shelter SA welcomes the opportunity to provide feedback about making South Australia An Affordable Place to Live.

An Affordable Place to Live

Shelter SA would like to highlight one of the most important aspects of ensuring South Australia is an affordable place to live for all citizens, especially those on low incomes. A significant proportion of public housing has been sold-off over the last ten years. This submission will focus on a single issue to ensure clarity around the importance of making the best use of public housing as a State asset through the transfer of public housing stock to the not-for-profit sector. The Shelter SA membership includes not-for-profit housing providers and it is an opportune time to focus on the impact of stock transfer on these organisations and the supply of social housing in South Australia.

Not-for-profit housing organisations (NFPs) have an important role to play in housing people living on low incomes as well as those with high and complex needs, who experience difficulties in accessing and/or maintaining private rental and home ownership. Discrimination is an additional barrier for many people from minority groups in accessing safe and affordable housing. Some NFPs have already demonstrated their capacity to provide affordable and social housing as well as the ability and will to grow their housing portfolios. Other NFPs that focus on tenancy and property management have proven that they can efficiently and effectively manage housing stock and reach their potential for further growth through innovative projects. If ownership of some of the properties currently managed by Housing SA is transferred to NFPs, the NFPs will be in a position to put the asset to work for the community and to increase the quality of the supply of affordable *and* social housing. Critically, transfers to the not for profit sector would allow the South Australian housing system to optimise the capture of Commonwealth Rent Assistance (CRA), a federal income

stream not currently available to public housing. It is recognised that the current, more sophisticated NFPs, are 'gearing up' for the future through significant internal business reforms, cementing and expanding their existing relationships with financial institutions and the private sector. The combination of increased revenue flows through the capture of the CRA and partnership with the private sector has the potential to reinvigorate the social housing system to deliver a range of positive outcomes for the community and across the whole of Government.

Some community members have raised questions about whether or not NFPs will become 'mini-institutions' if they own and manage larger portfolios. The NFPs however, will not control the regulatory environment or federal funding (in the form of Commonwealth Rent Assistance) and will not resemble the concentrated power and control of State Government. The community value base and visions of NFPs will not change in an environment where they are increasingly providing social housing. As well as improvements in governance and financial skills, we have seen the board members and senior managers of many NFPs change over time from a values-based skills set to a mixture of values and corporate skills, well-suited to their potential new roles as larger providers of social housing. The governance structures of NFPs will ensure that they continue to be accountable and transparent in their practice.

A South Australian Housing Strategy

While "An Affordable Place to Live" is being articulated as a goal for South Australia by State Government, Shelter SA notes that the State still does not have a Housing Strategy after the release of the Green Paper late in 2011. Without a plan, it is difficult for the NFPs to position themselves in partnerships with Government and the private sector. In their 2011 submission, Shelter SA commented that 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 by State Government to funding or direction in the Strategy about growth, except for mention of '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 - they also require a method to grow their portfolios. For some of these organisations, relatively small amounts of housing are required to better serve their niche groups and Common Equity is a good example of organisations working together in South Australia to share resources and expertise with a view to growing the supply of social housing.

Housing and Social Housing Ministers and their respective departments need to explore mechanisms that allow NFPs to grow their housing stock including stock transfer, direct funding and the provision of land for the benefit of all South Australian's and this intent must be clearly reflected in the final Housing Strategy for the State.

Tenant Engagement

Concerns have been raised by Shelter SA and peak bodies in other States and Territories about what happens to public housing tenants, in particular their rights and responsibilities, during stock transfer and urban renewal and this is an important area for consideration. NFPs must take a lead role in embedding tenant engagement in their practice and all stakeholders must work together to ensure that tenant rights and responsibilities are addressed.

Aboriginal Housing

Also contained in the 2011 Shelter SA submission to the Green Paper was a call for the creation of an Aboriginal Housing Association, in response to very strong support for this idea from community members. The Australian Housing and Urban Research Institute (2011) hails a 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 as one of the most significant initiatives to benefit Aboriginal people. The report titled "Urban social housing for Aboriginal people and Torres Strait Islanders: respecting culture and adapting services", contains criteria and indicators for social housing for Aboriginal people, which Shelter SA recommends should be adopted in South Australia. If there is a transfer of ownership of public housing stock to NFPs, the properties formerly assigned to the Aboriginal Housing Authority must be returned the new Association to create an opportunity to grow social housing specifically for Aboriginal people. Shelter SA would like to respectfully call upon the State Government to make it known to the public how many of these properties have been sold, how many have been replaced and how many remain.