

SUBMISSION TO DEPARTMENT OF COMMUNITIES

**DIRECTIONS PAPER FOR THE 10-YEAR
STRATEGY ON HOMELESSNESS
WESTERN AUSTRALIA 2019-2029**

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Executive Summary

Shelter WA welcomes the opportunity to provide a submission in response to the Department of Communities Directions Paper for the 10-Year Strategy on Homelessness Western Australia 2019-2019.

Shelter WA, as a member of Supporting Communities Forum Homelessness Working Group had the opportunity to help shape the Directions Paper for the 10 Year Strategy on Homelessness Western Australia 2019-2029 (the Strategy).

Shelter WA is a member of the Facilitating Group of the WA Alliance to End Homelessness. Shelter WA supports the recommendations in the WA Alliance to End Homelessness's (WAAEH) submission to the Direction Paper. Shelter WA believes that the recommendations in the WAAEH provide further improvement and clarity to the development of the Strategy.

In addition to these recommendations Shelter WA has provided insight into the reasons why the Strategy needs to:

- Be aimed at ending homelessness rather than responding to it.
- Consider how it will describe success and track impact, in partnership with the community sector.
- Ensure that there is a degree of robust analysis and understanding of current programs and activities – and the ability to assess current achievements so that current effective programs and services are not lost.
- Increase social and affordable housing supply.
- Enable and facilitate innovation, such as the use of contemporary technology, which is design led and consumer focussed, to streamline efforts, deliver efficiencies and enable consumers to have access to the information they need in real time.

Shelter WA

Shelter WA is the independent peak body, based in Perth, Western Australia, that advocates for social and affordable housing and ending homelessness.

Our vision is that all people living in Western Australia have housing that enables them to thrive.

Shelter WA brings together a strong coalition committed to diverse and affordable housing choice for all. With a focus on housing for people on low to moderate incomes and groups that experience housing insecurity.

Shelter WA undertakes research and policy development, engagement, and advocacy to drive solutions to build an effective housing system and alleviate housing-related poverty.



Housing unlocks opportunity, enhances health and well-being, provides access to education and employment options. It enables people to fully participate in community life. We believe housing is a basic human right. Everybody has a right to a place to call home.

Our Vision: All people living in Western Australia have housing that enables them to thrive.

Feedback on the Directions Paper

1. *General Feedback*

1.1. Amending the language from responding to preventing and ending homelessness

Services that respond to homelessness are necessary and valuable, but they may not effectively reduce or end homelessness. Preventing people from becoming homeless before it begins or moving people out of homelessness quickly by providing them access to safe, affordable and appropriate housing is key to ending homelessness. Other countries have shown that with the right planning, policy settings and investment, they can end homelessness. The strategy needs to reinforce a shift from managing and responding to homelessness, to preventing and ending homelessness.

Recommendation: Amend the language throughout the report from responding to homelessness to preventing and ending homelessness.

2. *Future Directions*

2.1. Continued support for effective programs

The proposed changes in the Directions Paper, while welcome, will have significant impacts on the current homelessness service sector. As such, it is important that the State Government undertake transparent and robust planning and evidence-based analysis of the current landscape with a view to identify what isn't working and highlighting the programs and services that are effective.

While transformation to the sector is needed the State must not lose sight that there are currently effective programs and services in place which should continue to receive support. A case in point is Foyer Oxford which is part of an international recognised approach to ending homelessness. The question needs to be asked would an initiative like this, which has a strong track record, be supported under the future directions?

There is a critical need to consider transition arrangements and what support may be required by the service sector, and clients, through a clear, supportive and planned change management process.

Recommendation:

Ensure that transparent, robust and evidence-based analysis of homelessness services is undertaken with a view to continuing the support of effective programs going forward.

That there is a clear and supportive change management process in place to mitigate the impact of change on the service sector and their clients.

2.2. Increase housing supply and implementation of affordable rentals

In addition to system transformation and trialling new housing types and models it is vital that the provision of diverse, affordable and social housing is increased.

To prevent homelessness, some people who are just poor, require access to a secure, affordable home. They do not need engagement with the service system.

Housing insecurity remains a key issue for many Western Australians. Western Australia has a shortfall of 136,000 affordable homes to meet current needs¹. Additionally, approximately 14,000 people are on the social housing waitlist in WA with an average wait time of over two and a half years². This unmet demand for housing is expected to continue to grow with WA's population continuing to increase.

Based on research by the Australian Housing and Urban Research Institute (AHURI), at a minimum the State needs to deliver an additional 60,000 units of new social housing supply to respond to projected demand³.

Low cost private rentals are also in shortage, as outlined in the recent Anglicare Rental Affordability Report. To address this there needs to be support for investment in the community housing sector, the implementation of a private rental brokerage scheme and rental subsidy that would ensure affordability of a sufficient number of rental properties throughout WA.

Further consideration must be given to the needs of vulnerable housing consumers such as, young people, older women and seniors on low incomes, Aboriginal people and people from different cultural backgrounds, people with disabilities and people with serious and persistent mental health issues.

1 Lawson, J., Pawson, H., Troy, L., van den Nouwelant, R. and Hamilton, C. (2018) Social housing as infrastructure: an investment pathway, AHURI Final Report No. 306, Australian Housing and Urban Research Institute Limited, Melbourne, <https://www.ahuri.edu.au/research/final-reports/306>, doi:10.18408/ahuri-5314301.

² Ibid

³ Rowley, S., Leishman, C., Baker, E., Bentley, R. and Lester, L. (2017) Modelling housing need in Australia to 2025, AHURI Final Report No. 287, Australian Housing and Urban Research Institute Limited, Melbourne, <https://www.ahuri.edu.au/research/final-reports/287>, doi:10.18408/ahuri-8106901

Recommendation: Increase government investment in the supply of affordable and social housing and include specific responses for vulnerable housing consumers, in addition to implementing new housing models and approaches.

2.3. Enabling smart technology

Across the services sector old technology is being used. For example, there is limited access to real time data on the provision of services, with services having to phone in bed counts to a central point, with this information quickly out of date. There is a need to take a design led, client focussed approach to information access. This technology needs initial and ongoing investment to ensure that it remains agile and contemporary. Current online data basis do not utilise contemporary technology. A number of prototypes are in development but support for these enabling platforms must be facilitated through the Strategy.

Recommendation:

That the strategy enables and facilitates innovation, such as the use of contemporary technology, which is design lead and consumer focussed, to streamline effort, deliver efficiencies and enable consumers to have access to the information they need in real time.

Conclusion

The Directions Paper needs to be based on a shift from managing and responding to homelessness, to preventing and ending it. While Shelter WA welcomes the State's 10-Year Strategy on Homelessness Western Australia 2019-2029 there is further opportunity, as identified in Shelter WA and WAAEH's recommendations, to ensure that this Strategy supports a cohesive, clear and effective housing system which will enable all affected parties to plan and align with the changes.