



Policy review discussion paper

This document is intended to provide a discussion platform for the Queensland Shelter
2009 Policy review.

Introduction

Since [June 2007 when we last revised our policy platform](#), many changes have taken place that make aspects of our current policies redundant or in need of updating. This discussion paper provides delegates and members with a context in which to evaluate the relevance of our policies or to suggest new areas we need policies in.

The principal change that has subsequently driven many other changes has been the change of our Federal Government.

The election of a Rudd Government has ushered in an era that recognises the centrality of housing to quality of life and opportunity. Importantly the Rudd Government has honoured election commitments in the following areas:

1. The appointment of a Commonwealth Minister for Housing, The Hon. Tanya Plibersek M.P.
2. The development of a National Affordable Housing Agreement to replace the Commonwealth State and Territories Housing Agreement (CSHTA) and the Supported Accommodation and Assistance Program (SAAP)
3. The creation of a National Rental Affordability Scheme
4. A major supply boost to the level of social housing

At the State level we have seen several significant changes since the adoption of the policy platform including:

1. A major boost to social housing from State Government Future Funds (500m over 4 years)
2. The development of One Social Housing System
3. New tenancy legislation
4. Bringing together the former Departments of Housing and Communities in a new Government entity, the Department of Communities
5. A change of Minister and some key personnel in the new Department of Communities.
6. Approaching the issue of housing and homelessness as a single agenda through targeting new social housing at people at risk of or experiencing homelessness.

At the community level there have also been several significant developments which have an impact on our policy direction and scope:

1. The recognition of Queensland Shelter and the Tenants Union of Queensland as the two peak bodies for tenants and policy development in Queensland
2. The funding of the SAAP Networking Project, a joint project of Queensland Shelter and QCOSS
3. A larger staff complement at Queensland Shelter and many new branches
4. The expectation that Queensland Shelter will now work across many new areas and develop policy on behalf of the entire social and low – moderate income housing areas.

With that large change agenda to contend with it is appropriate we again review our policy platform to recognise that many of our positions have had responses and to update the platform to see what new reforms will be needed in the medium term.

Terminology

The Chairperson of the Affordable Housing Summit Group, Julian Disney, has consistently raised the issue of accurate terminology, in relation to housing, as a concern and cause of confusion in promoting solutions to the many issues we face.

Specifically the interchange of public housing, social housing, affordable housing and community housing makes it difficult to interpret and understand the issues and potential solutions.

He has suggested we need a framework beginning with Affordable Housing under which we should categorise types of housing based on the level of subsidy it attracts and or the type of tenant it houses.

- *"Affordable housing programs"* include public housing, non-profit housing, other housing subsidised under NRAS and some home purchase assistance programs. They must comply with the proposed requirements relating to affordability profiles, household profiles and provider profiles.
- *"Band A"* dwellings are those for which, except in specified circumstances, rents must be kept below [25%] of residents' incomes for at least [25] years (although actual rents may be set by other criteria).
- *"Band B"* dwellings are those for which, except in specified circumstances, rents must be kept at least [20%] below market rent for at least [10] years.
- *"Band C"* dwellings are those in approved types of home purchase programs for low- or moderate-income households.
- *"High-need households"* have gross incomes below [50%] of the State/Territory median income for their type of household composition and/or have other defined types of special need (eg, Indigenous people, homeless people and people with mental illness or disabilities).

Another aspect of terminology is in relation to homelessness. Too many agencies and commentators refer to "Homeless people" as if homelessness is a permanent characteristic of certain people. The experience of most people who lose their housing is that homelessness is a temporary and episodic experience rather than a permanent characteristic. We should refer to homelessness as an experience, episodic and temporary, so instead of homeless people we should prefer to talk of people who experience homelessness.

New Federal Context

NAHA

The National Affordable Housing Agreement lays a foundation for new supply and the evolution of the treatment of housing and homelessness as related and connected agendas.

The NAHA is an agreement at the Council of Australian Government (COAG) level and is therefore an agreement struck between Prime Ministers and Premiers and Treasurers at both levels.

This means that the Minister for Communities (Housing and Homelessness Services) is one step removed from the major negotiations and that departmental officials inform rather than directly negotiate the agreement. This has implications for where policy is targeted, who is lobbied and the degree of understanding at the headline policy level.

It is also a major recommendation of our previous platform and so can also be considered as an achievement.

Nation Building & Jobs Plan (Stimulus Package)

The Nation Building and Jobs Plan is a new initiative part of which has allocated \$6.2b nationally or \$1.5b in Queensland to building new social housing. The package has the expectation that up to 75% of this new housing will be managed and owned by the community housing sector.

The package is over 4 years with an expectation that at least 75% of it will be allocated and spent within 2 years.

The package is the largest single boost to social housing in Australia's history and will put back 20,000 units of housing lost to social housing stock through the period of office of the Howard Government.

Social housing declined from about 400,000 dwellings in 1996 to est. 390,000 in 2008. If it had maintained its share of housing the projected figure would be 480,000.¹

Q: Given that some of the stimulus developments will be built in less than ideal locations, what strategies can be used to ensure tenants have access to appropriate services?

Q: How does Q Shelter maintain housing focus, while embracing government agendas around joined up service and priorities including jobs?

NRAS

The introduction in 2008 of the National Rental Affordability Scheme (NRAS) fills a key plank of the National and Queensland Shelter platform in 2007. NRAS will see an additional

50,000 properties nationally or 12,500 properties in Queensland added to the affordable rental market.

NRAS properties will be built by private developers and managed by community housing providers and rented to eligible tenants at up to 80% of market rents for 10 years after which they may revert to market properties and sold either to tenants or to market.

NRAS could also be boosted with some capital to achieve greater affordability or longer tenure negotiated project by project. NRAS is supported by a 10 year subsidy of \$8,000 per year per property made up of \$6,000 Commonwealth and \$2000 State subsidy.

Homelessness White Paper “The Road Home”ⁱⁱ

The White Paper outlines the Federal Government’s new approach to dealing with people experiencing homelessness. Its approach is to firstly prevent people becoming homeless through limiting the numbers of people becoming homeless due to other service system failures (child protection, exiting corrections, domestic violence causing women and children to flee, mental health response inadequacies, etc). Secondly, by reforming the homelessness service system in conjunction with State and Territory Governments and the community sector.

Each State and Territory has been asked to develop an implementation plan and we are towards the end of that process.

It has also determined that the additional funding for social housing contained in the NAHA and the NB&JP will be targeted at people experiencing or at risk of experiencing homelessness.

New State Context

The context of housing and homelessness has also changed dramatically in line with the new federal agenda and as a result of changes to the Bligh Cabinet.

The first major shift occurred some 2-3 years ago through a major injection of \$500m over 4 years to public housing by the previous government. This built on measures begun by the Responding to Homelessness initiative (R2H) which allocated 435.5m to homelessness via seven government departments. This measure also brought Queensland into compliance with Commonwealth requirements for 50/50 matching for homelessness funding.

Bligh Cabinet

The new Bligh Cabinet and the appointment of the Hon. Karen Struthers M.P. as Minister for Housing and Community Services and Minister for Women signal a significant direction change towards the community sector.

The new Department of Communities has embraced the Commonwealth agenda that 75% of stimulus housing ends up in the community sector, potentially with title. It also brings the former departments of Housing, Communities, DSQ, Aboriginal and Torres Strait

Islander Policy and Multicultural Affairs into one departmental structure with a single Director General, Ms Linda Apelt.

The most important aspect of this for Q Shelter is the joining of Communities and Housing which brings housing and homelessness services into a single structure. It is also significant that issues related to our new brief (Indigenous housing, disability) are also now in a single structure.

Tenancy Legislation

Another important development since our last policy platform review has been the introduction of new tenancy legislation in Queensland. Whilst the new legislation was received by the community sector and Tenants Union of Queensland (TUQ) as a positive evolution, there are still elements of the policy which we may wish to lobby further on. Issues like no cause eviction at the end of leases and legislative changes in relation to these should be progressed in partnership with the TUQ.

OSHS

Whilst One Social Housing System was introduced prior to our last review, the single register of need, allocation process and broadened base of the system are clearer now. [For a fuller discussion of this refer to our project report.](#)

One of the key findings of the report was that effective networking and communication are essential to making the social housing system work for clients.

Q: How should regional homelessness and housing networks be structured to facilitate this networking and communication?

*Please also refer to the Support section of this document for other questions relating to the OSHS

Supply Context

I. Demand-supply gap

Comparison between the estimate of underlying demand and medium term supply projections showed a cumulative gap at 2028 of 431,000 dwellings nationally.

Analysis of 2006 Census data showed the need for an additional 251,000 rental dwellings affordable and available for lower income households. In Queensland this would represent a shortfall of approximately 62,750 dwellings.

Social housing declined from about 400,000 dwellings in 1996 to est. 390,000 in 2008. If it had maintained its share of housing the projected figure would be 480,000.

P65 Homelessness ABS Census Figures Counting the homes 2006 cat. No. 2050.0

	<i>Queensland</i>	<i>Australia</i>
Sleeping rough	5100	16400
Sharing with friends or relatives	13100	47300
Marginal residents of caravan parks	6385	17497

Major Issues

New supply

Whilst the NB&JP will bring new supply to the affordable housing market it also brings some attendant issues. The first of these is that most new stock will be targeted at people at risk of or experiencing homelessness. This is a welcome development but means many more people with support requirements will be placed in housing managed by government and NGO providers. There is however only limited new money (approx 22.5m per annum) being provided through the homelessness partnership agreement in Queensland.

If we are to house far more people at risk of or emerging from homeless episodes we need to rethink how support is provided, to whom, by whom and over what time period.

It is timely to discuss a new approach to support. The SAAP program has been the major means of providing support to people experiencing homelessness. This has meant that people experiencing homelessness have needed to access a SAAP service to receive support. The system has been driven by the service system rather than the requirements of the people experiencing homelessness.

It is important to point out that there are more people experiencing homelessness outside of the SAAP system than inside. That many people in the general population have the same or similar experiences and survive due to informal support networks (family and friends), the fact they have savings and or the means to develop their own survival strategies.

Analysis of the characteristics of social housing tenants and users of SAAP services reveal like profiles. Characteristics identified by SAAP services about their clients are the same as the profiles of public housing tenants.

Q. Who are the players that should be brought together to plan social and affordable housing? What mechanisms can be used?

Q. How can community concern and backlash against social and affordable housing developments be addressed?

Support Requirements

This leads to the need to discuss how housing and support could be provided in the future. There is a need to consider the support needs of a broader population than people who enter a SAAP service. This is not to make criticism of SAAP as a program or services funded by SAAP but to begin a discussion about approaches which account for the real level of homelessness and the full range of supports that may need to be provided to tenants of social housing to ensure tenancies may be sustained, e.g. Education, Training, Health related support, Sport and Recreation, access to advocacy and legal services; Community connectedness, Child Care, etc.

Q. How do we provide appropriate levels of support to people experiencing homelessness or now housed in an expanded social housing system?

Q. How do we ensure a service system is based on the needs of service users rather than service providers?

Q. Should Q Shelter policy advocate that supports be considered at both an individual and community level?

Recruitment, Training and sector development

A growing issue for the affordable housing and homelessness sectors is the recruitment of and ongoing training for workers in our sector and the development of capacity for service providers.

Staff in community services generally emerge out of TAFE based training in housing through their certificate III and IV programs or through social work and welfare work courses at University. There is very little strategy to recruitment into our sector to ensure we attract well qualified staff.

In terms of sector development this is a role we have left to QCHC, QCOSS and the TUQ in terms of direct training, capacity development and sector development. With growing partnerships with QCOSS in relation to homelessness services, ICHOs through our own project, the emergence of scale providers in the community housing sector and the limited ability of QCHC to further develop training and sector development, it is timely to review our role on and relationships in relation to these issues.

Queensland Shelter has never had a strong role in direct training as distinct from information provision and consultation around issues and developments. With our expanded role as a peak we may need to consider if we have a role in training, capacity and sector development.

Q. Should sector development and training be a part of a Shelter purpose in the future?

Q. Should this be a role we consider by ourselves or in partnership with others (QCOSS, QCHC, Universities, and TAFE)?

Q. Should Q Shelter be developing recruitment strategies to attract well qualified staff into welfare services generally, and housing and homeless service provision specifically? What could that consist of?

Providers

The new role of Q Shelter since the peaks review has been to develop policy across the broad range of issues, population groups and providers in housing and homelessness. We have stated we do not seek to be a representative body for providers as we maintain a primary purpose to represent the interests and issues of Queenslanders with housing issues, particularly for low and moderate income earning households. We have also stated we will represent the policy issued in relation to providers of various kinds without taking the role of direct representation.

The development of larger providers (BHC, BRIC, MATCH/Brisbane Boarders, SCHC, GCHC etc in SEQ, future development of scale providers in Townsville, Cairns, Mackay etc, and similar patterns nationally) is a factor that may affect our ongoing role.

We are also seeing the development of a new single National Standard and Regulatory Framework for housing providers which may see NGO providers and State Govt providers subject to the same single national regulatory framework and standards.

In terms of Indigenous providers we have taken a direct role in consulting with them and making representation to Government on issues they have identified.

In terms of homelessness service providers we share the auspice of the SAAP Networking Project with QCOSS and are taking a role representing the issues and concerns of homelessness service providers.

Q. Should these functions be the limit of Q Shelter's roles in relation to providers?

Q. If we were to expand our role what structures would we need to consider to ensure we maintain a balance between issues affecting providers and housing consumers?

Q. Should we continue to work in partnership with others (QCOSS, QCHC e.g.) or develop our own capacity?

Consumers

In relation to much of the work we undertake we work with service provider, Govt, NGO and private sector, but with the issues affecting consumers as central to our purpose. So we may consider policy and practice issues with service providers, but with a central eye on the impacts on service users and consumers. This is consistent with our objects and functions laid out in our constitution.

Within that there is often specific work we develop in relation to specific groups of consumers. In recent years that spread of housing consumers has increased due to economic and other factors so we also often comment on interest rate policy, planning,

supply issues, levels of and experiences of housing consumers or folk who cannot find housing.

We have taken the view that all parts of the housing market and system are related and therefore we need to be commenting on ownership trends as this has a direct impact on low income households and their ability to gain and maintain appropriate, affordable, safe, secure housing.

Q. Is it appropriate we now seek to address issues affecting moderate income working people/families, including mortgage stress and the first home market?

Q. Should we limit the range of issues we comment on or develop policy in relation to?

Population Groups

Among the broad consumer focus we often make specific representation in relation to particular population groups like; Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders, Women, Migrants, Refugees, Young People, people with Health and Disability issues.

This has become part of our expanded brief and also due to organisational commitments to population groups particularly affected, like young people in relation to rental or homelessness.

It is worth checking in with our members and delegates about the relative priorities in relation to these groups.

Q. Are there specific groups we should focus on more?

Q. Is the above list complete or are there other groups who may have a greater claim on our policy resources? e.g. International and domestic students currently experiencing high levels of overcrowding.

Strengthening Social Housing (SSH) an example of the changed agenda

Prior to the State election we have been involved in a reference groups for Strengthening Social Housing in relation to the community housing sector. The SSH process involved:

- reshaping the Community Housing Planning Group as a Social Housing Forum (SHF),
- developing the Business Development and Innovation Unit (BDIU) in the Department of Communities, replacing the Community Housing Resource Workers program
- developing Housing Area Networks in each region.

Since the election the State Government has brought housing and homelessness into the same space, embraced an agenda to build the community housing sector and wants to develop capacity outside rather than inside Government.

This means we should consider the implications of these changes for this agenda. So, the Secretariat has already begun a process to discuss ensuring the Housing Area Networks become Housing and Homelessness Networks, begun a conversation with Communities about the future of the BDIU transferring to the community sector as previously indicated, but perhaps sooner rather than later, and transforming the SHF into an Affordable Housing and Homelessness Forum.

Q. What role should Q Shelter take in relation to all of this?

Q. What should be the future shape of the SSH process?

ⁱ Housing Supply Council inaugural report.

ⁱⁱ Groan with me at the title.