

Hon Colin Tincknell; Hon Alison Xamon; Hon Diane Evers; Hon Alannah MacTiernan; Hon Robin Scott; Hon  
Tjorn Sibma; Hon Kyle McGinn

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## SOCIAL HOUSING — DWELLINGS

### *Motion*

**HON COLIN TINCKNELL (South West)** [10.10 am] — without notice: I move —

That this house acknowledges the shameful policies of the McGowan government that have led to a tragic rise in the number of homeless Western Australians and a large reduction in the quantity and quality of social housing dwellings available to Western Australians.

More than 9 000 people are homeless in Western Australia. I would like to be standing here and saying to those 9 000 Western Australians who sleep without a home each night: have hope because the number of homeless people is dwindling and your turn will come. But that would be a lie. The policies, lies, laziness and hypocrisy of this government means that there is a pretty good chance that a person who is sleeping rough under a bridge right now, is sleeping rough with fellow Western Australians who had thought that by now they would have had a chance of finding a home. I wish that was not the case. I would feel better were my fellow members and I here not here debating a motion about a Labor government that has failed to address and reduce the number of homeless souls on the streets. The trouble is that there has been a major increase in homelessness under this Labor government. This government has had three and a half years to do something, but, as I said, the number of homeless people is increasing in WA.

According to statistics from the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, there has been a nearly five per cent increase in the number of Western Australians who need homelessness support. That is an increase in just one year of more than 1 000 Western Australians who have been reduced to the indignity of living their daily existence without a home. Knowing how little her government has done to reduce this number, I imagine Minister McGurk is very afraid and dreading the release of the 2019–20 figures on homelessness in the next few months. I am sure that members opposite are not very proud about how their government has turned its back on the most vulnerable people in our society. What has the government done? It has done very little. There should be a drumroll in the background, but it is not a good tale. It is a very, very poor tale. The government has produced a plan for a plan—a word salad. It has forgotten about housing homeless people. After three and a half years, the Minister for Community Services has produced a word salad. The Department of Communities made a big announcement when it launched its strategy document “All Paths Lead to a Home: Western Australia’s 10-Year Strategy on Homelessness 2020–2030”. How much did it cost to produce that document? What an insult to the 9 000 Western Australians who are doing it rough and living on the street, who do not see any hope of a home becoming available for them and who just see smoke and mirrors and endless promises that do not amount to anything. This strategy will not increase their chances of finding a home.

I would like to give some insight on what has happened. After all the self-congratulation and patting on the back, a page in that strategy titled “Where we will focus our efforts” sets out what the department will focus on. That includes, firstly, improving Aboriginal wellbeing; secondly, providing safe, secure and stable homes; thirdly, preventing homelessness; and, fourthly, strengthening and coordinating our responses and impacts. It has been three and a half years and there are 18 words in this document: “Improving Aboriginal wellbeing”, “Providing safe, secure and stable homes”, “Preventing homelessness” and “Strengthening and coordinating our responses and impact”. Did the McGowan government really need a three-year study to tell it about these obvious issues and problems that have been in our community for a long, long time? I do not think so. What we needed was the government to act on the promises, announcements and spin that it has given us.

Just before Christmas, I made a speech in this house about homelessness. A year before that I made another speech in this house about homelessness. Following those speeches, there have been many announcements, but no action. This is like a business opening up and saying that it is going to make a profit—that is it. That is not a plan; that is an objective. This is not a plan either; this is a plan for another plan. It is very disappointing.

The most important thing to do is to work out how to prevent homelessness. How do we do that? The statistics tell us what is happening, and the stats do not lie. If we want to prevent homelessness, we need to address serious issues in our community. Domestic violence is the single biggest cause of homelessness in Australia. Let me repeat that: domestic violence is the single biggest cause of homelessness in Australia. To give an example, 24 per cent of homeless people are homeless because of domestic and family violence. I will go through some other figures because there are many other factors.

The Labor government, again in a flurry of media hype, with the state’s first Minister for Prevention of Family and Domestic Violence, has had no effect. Australian Bureau of Statistics’ figures released last month show, tragically, that between 2018–19, Western Australia had the highest percentage increase of any state in Australia in family and domestic violence-related assaults. Other areas that attribute to homelessness include financial difficulties, 20 per cent, and the housing crisis, 16 per cent. The big three are domestic violence, financial difficulties and the

Hon Colin Tincknell; Hon Alison Xamon; Hon Diane Evers; Hon Alannah MacTiernan; Hon Robin Scott; Hon Tjorn Sibma; Hon Kyle McGinn

---

housing crisis. Then comes inappropriate and inadequate dwellings; other relationship issues; health issues—mental health and anxiety—and the list goes on. The harsh reality is that, other than for a simple lack of a permanent abode, it is not difficult to see why a woman in an unsafe environment does not just leave. It is not as simple as that. It is very, very difficult for those women to leave, let us say, a violent relationship and look ahead to the future.

A few journalists and others have been writing about this issue. I have also spoken to them many times, asking them to highlight this major problem in Western Australia. We keep saying that Western Australia is the powerhouse of the Australian economy and all that, yet all these people—the number is growing by 1 000 a year—are homeless. In *WAtoday*, journalist Kate Hedley gave a good insight to the problem when she wrote —

Statistics ... show more than 52 per cent of rough sleepers had reported being a victim of assault since becoming homeless.

Let us think about that for a moment. That means that every second person we see sleeping in the CBD has been a victim of violence. We often hear the rhetoric that people feel unsafe walking the streets of Perth because they see so many homeless people, but the homeless people are not causing the problem; other people cause problems for those homeless people. I repeat: 52 per cent of rough sleepers have reported being a victim of violence. She continues —

It means every second rough sleeper you come across as you walk through the Perth CBD has been attacked on the streets.

Compare that to how many victims of violent crime you personally know of in your everyday life.

This is not coming from me; this was written by journalist Kate Hedley from *WAtoday*. She continues —

Even without the constant threat of violence hanging over their heads, people experiencing homelessness are at greater risk of physical illnesses including cancer, heart disease and diabetes.

These same people are much more likely to develop—or to already suffer from—significant mental illnesses ...

**The PRESIDENT:** Member, is that a quote that you are reading?

**Hon COLIN TINCKNELL:** Yes. There are many quotes in the press. Much commentary has come from the press about this issue. It is a serious issue. I am quoting from Kate Hedley from *WAtoday*. As I stated, she wrote —

These same people are much more likely to develop—or to already suffer from—significant mental illnesses, with up to 40 per cent of homeless people winding up in our emergency departments with mental health concerns.

About a month ago, Kate retweeted one of her stories. She spoke to those same people she had spoken to a year or so before and found that they were still homeless. They still have very little hope and they are still living rough on the street.

As I mentioned before, going back a while, there are many alternatives right around the world to solving the homelessness problem. The Housing First Homelessness Initiative was announced last December, yet at this stage we have not seen any results. It has gone the other way; it is getting worse for the people who are living rough. We have seen plenty of announcements and plenty of spin but no action. The statistics bear that out. This Labor government should be better at providing social housing; it is in its DNA. It should be hanging its head in shame because it has let down the people of Western Australia.

As I said, there has been an increase of 1 000 homeless people in one year. How does this happen? It happens because there has been a decrease in social housing, which means that another 1 600 people in Western Australia are not able to access social housing. Yes, we have heard the glossy announcements by the Minister for Housing and the Premier about 250 new homes. There has been a lot of backslapping and all that, but the government has failed to mention that despite providing an extra 250 homes, which we heard about in June, the number of social housing dwellings has decreased by 1 000 over the past three years since it formed government. This is a Labor government. How can that happen? As I mentioned before, that is 1 600 fewer people being accommodated. They are ending up on the street. Over the past 12 months, an additional 1 000 people have become homeless. As I said before, I imagine that the minister will be dreading that time when the new figures come out.

I conclude by saying that we have asked quite a few questions about this issue in this house. I remind members of Mr Tinley's answers to the questions asked in this house. In response to a question in Parliament, Mr Tinley said that there were 44 087 social housing dwellings in WA as at 30 June 2017 but that number had dropped to 42 953. Mr Tinley tabled figures showing that 64 168 Western Australians were being supported in social housing as at 30 June 2017 but that number has now dropped to 62 523. As I said before, the 250 houses that were announced in June do not even make up for the increase that has occurred, with fewer homes available. Also, 300 homes

Hon Colin Tincknell; Hon Alison Xamon; Hon Diane Evers; Hon Alannah MacTiernan; Hon Robin Scott; Hon Tjorn Sibma; Hon Kyle McGinn

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were added last December. That is still not even half the number of houses in social housing that have been lost by this government.

These are the issues: 24 per cent of homeless people have experienced family and domestic violence. The number of people who are homeless is increasing in WA. We have the worst figures in Australia. Twenty per cent of people have financial difficulties. The cost of homes has risen over the past three and a half years. The policies of this government and previous governments have not helped the situation. Home ownership right across Australia is going down. We basically have three groups now: people who own homes, people who are renting and a massive number of homeless people. We used to have only two: a major group of home owners and a small group of renters, with very few, if next to none, homeless people. That is a failure of the way we have been handling this issue.

I have mentioned homelessness many times in this house. Virtually straight after my speeches, it is a funny coincidence, but an announcement is made within a week. It happened last December, it happened in June and I imagine it will happen in the next couple of days. That is absolute spin. The government is an absolute master of that spin. I am looking for some action. Do not give me the spin and the smoke and mirrors. I have been in this house for about three and a half years and I have not seen any action. The only action is that things are getting worse. Homelessness is getting worse. We have seen 1 000 extra people on the streets in the past year. There is less social housing now under a Labor government—this is its DNA—than there was before. What has happened to this Labor government? Have animal activists been keeping it too busy to look at the really important things such as social housing? Is it too busy looking after minority groups that have a loud voice in its government or is it not doing its main job, which is looking after the people of Western Australia? Maybe there are not enough votes from the 9 000 people who are living rough on the streets. These are the reasons that the government really gives these people no hope. They have no hope. It is getting worse.

There was a stage when the government said it would do all of this. It announced the Housing First Homelessness Initiative and outlined what it would do about domestic violence. The last time I spoke to the housing minister, I asked him what had happened. He said that when COVID-19 came, the government had put a hold on that. How can the government put a hold on social decline when there is a health problem in the community? That is when a government should be ramping up and taking double the action and investing more money. The people of Western Australia elected the Labor government because it should be good at dealing with social issues, but it has not performed; it has let the people down. Members opposite should be ashamed of their performance in this area.

**HON ALISON XAMON (North Metropolitan)** [10.30 am]: I am very pleased to speak on this very important motion. The issue of homelessness, the lack of social housing and what has happened under this government have caused serious disquiet, particularly within the homelessness sector, but also in a whole range of related areas, such as mental health, disability, family and domestic violence and child protection services. There is a huge concern that this government has simply not taken the issue of homelessness and the need for social and community housing seriously enough. There is no way that the government has showered itself in glory.

That was never more evident than during the initial response to the outbreak of COVID-19, when the investment the government made to ensure that people who were sleeping rough would be in safe accommodation was woefully inadequate when compared with the sort of investment that happened in all the other states. As soon as it appeared that we were out of immediate danger from COVID-19, those supports were effectively pulled. We are now in a situation in which things are worse than ever. It is true; the statistics do not lie. Service providers like St Patrick's Community Support Centre tell us that the number of people who are rough sleeping and who are coming into their service for help is increasing on a daily basis. I have spoken to my colleague and friend, who will hopefully soon join me here, the Mayor of Fremantle, Brad Pettitt, and he is adamant that the situation in Fremantle around homelessness and rough sleeping is worse than it has ever been. He is at his wit's end from trying to get the government to pay the sort of attention to this issue that it desperately needs. Even close to home for me, in the north metropolitan region, there has been a massive increase in concern around rough sleeping, particularly in the Perth CBD. It is now at the point of becoming a primary issue of focus as we go into the Perth city council elections. Yet, as has been rightly identified, it is not actually a local government issue; this is a state government issue, and it is happening under this Labor government. This Labor government should be ashamed.

I have watched the Labor government come out with announcement after announcement around homelessness and housing, and the media just laps it up and does not question what is actually happening. But the statistics do not lie. The reality is that there has been a serious underinvestment in social housing over a very long time. As has already been pointed out, and I think it warrants repeat, as at 30 June 2017, there were 36 963 public housing properties and 7 124 community properties, or 44 087 properties in total. That number had fallen—we had gone backwards—by May this year, despite all the announcements. We had gone backwards this year to 35 636 public housing properties and 7 317 community housing properties. That was a reduction to 42 953 in total. As of 30 June 2017,

Hon Colin Tincknell; Hon Alison Xamon; Hon Diane Evers; Hon Alannah MacTiernan; Hon Robin Scott; Hon Tjorn Sibma; Hon Kyle McGinn

---

there were 64 168 public housing householders, yet at 31 May 2020 there were 62 523 public housing householders. This government is planning to construct only 550 new properties.

That is not nearly enough to replace all the properties that were lost. We are already talking about an area that has suffered chronic underinvestment under successive governments. According to Anglicare, before COVID-19, WA needed about 15 000 additional public housing properties. It estimates that that number could double, given the economic impact of COVID-19. There are an estimated 9 100 homeless people in Western Australia, and over 3 000 of those people are children. Three thousand children in this state are currently homeless. Those overall numbers are expected to grow once the federal government's COVID-19 income support payments and the state government's moratorium on evictions end. There is a looming crisis in this state under the watch of this government. As at 31 May 2020, there were 14 328 applications on the public housing waiting list. That represents 23 709 people. Of those applications, 1 860 were priority listed, representing 3 347 people. These people require priority housing, yet they still cannot get housing.

Although there was a decrease in the number of public housing evictions from 2016–17 to 2017–18, unfortunately we have noted that this number is starting to climb again. Arrears and disruptive behaviour were the two main reasons for eviction, although I have to make it very clear that even those numbers do not represent the true situation. The Department of Communities does not report the number of tenancies that end following nonrenewal of tenancy agreements; it reports only on actual evictions. In 2017–18, in reality, 562 public housing tenancies ended after legal action was taken by the government.

As has already been mentioned, First Nation people are estimated to make up approximately one-third of WA's homeless. They continue to experience higher levels of housing disadvantage than other Western Australians and comprise 41 per cent of those who are receiving support from homelessness agencies. There is a lot to be learnt from Indigenous-led solutions in other jurisdictions, such as Canada. That is something we need to pay more attention to, because we are not learning any lessons here in Western Australia.

Prior to the pandemic, young people made up a significant proportion of the homeless population in WA. This is likely to worsen post-COVID-19. Half of the people who are accessing youth homelessness services had slept rough before the age of 18, and two-thirds of them had been in out-of-home care, so they were children who already had been failed. More than half had run away from home because they were experiencing violence from their parents or guardians. For close to a year, the south west, great southern and wheatbelt have had close to zero youth crisis beds available. I know that my colleague Hon Diane Evers has a lot to say about the issue of homelessness in the regions.

I also note that Western Australia is in the top four states nationally for the highest shortfall in specialist disability accommodation. Also, there is a chronic lack of support for complex cases—that is, people who experience ongoing mental health issues, who have disability, or who experience issues such as hoarding. This has been an ongoing problem. There has been a failure to adequately respond to rough sleepers.

We note that the rental market is incredibly tight. The rental vacancy rate across Perth is the lowest it has been since 2015, and the number of properties for lease has dropped significantly over the last 12 months. We are currently down to about 4 000 properties for lease. That will mean that people will be further squeezed out of the private rental market, particularly if they are vulnerable people.

What do we need? Clearly, the first thing we need to do is to build more social housing. This government has shut down more housing than it has built or is planning to build, yet it releases spin after spin. I assume that some sort of announcement will be made after this debate, which will be lapped up by a media that will not bother to find out the true situation. That is very lucky for this government! But it is not lucky for those who are without a home and who are sleeping rough on our streets; it is not lucky for them. The first thing the government needs to do is recognise that there is a chronic shortfall. It has actually sent us backwards. It needs to bring investment close to what we need.

We also need to ensure that individualised and person-driven supports wraparound particularly vulnerable people. Good work began around trying to develop those frameworks. Interestingly, the work done under the previous government through the Mental Health Commission—credit where credit is due—has basically fallen by the wayside, and we certainly have not seen any investment. Australian and international research demonstrates that on average it costs less to provide appropriate housing and support to a person who is at risk of becoming homeless or experiencing homelessness compared with providing that same person with short-term and ongoing emergency and institutional responses, and covering the health and other costs of homelessness. As I say in this place all the time, if the government simply does not care about the people, if it does not care about Western Australians, can it at least look at it from a financial perspective, because the dollars do not add up?

Hon Colin Tincknell; Hon Alison Xamon; Hon Diane Evers; Hon Alannah MacTiernan; Hon Robin Scott; Hon Tjorn Sibma; Hon Kyle McGinn

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**HON DIANE EVERS (South West)** [10.41 am]: I thank Hon Colin Tincknell for bringing forward this motion. Homelessness is a serious situation in this state, as it is in many places in this country and the world. I would like to focus on homelessness in the regional areas because that is where I see it most. Unfortunately, in the regional areas where services are hard to come by, depending on where people live, the range of services that might be available in the city area to look after people and to address their needs are just not there, and people have to travel. Of course, that might work if someone is living in their car and can drive—if they have fuel to get there—but some people do not even have a car. Transport to get to those services to even talk to somebody and fill out the forms is not always possible, particularly going back to our conversation yesterday about why we need a fast and reliable broadband and mobile service to help deliver those services in the regions.

For now, people in the regions are doing it by themselves in a lot of ways, trying to come up with ideas that we can use to address the issues of homelessness. However, we have to look much more broadly than that. If we look just at homelessness and we provide a house, which I fully suggest is something we should get on to, we see also that we can use our plantation timber industry as it develops to build low-cost affordable homes in various areas where people need them. They may not be the most profitable homes to build—developers will not come up with them all the time—but we have to ensure that that happens somehow because affordable housing is needed so that people in regional areas have a place to live on their lower incomes. They might even just be on Centrelink benefits of one sort or another. We have to build the homes first, but that does not solve all the problems.

I have spoken to an organisation in Albany called Pivot Support Services. Its base focus is working with men who are released from prison, but it works with them from six months beforehand and then afterwards. The remit is to work with them for about a year to get them set up as functioning members in the community. Of course, it is not all that simple. First, they are coming out of prison: What life are they going to go back into—is it just where they started? Do they have drug and alcohol dependencies? Do they have any chance of getting employment? Do they have mental health issues? There can be many other things going on. For one person it was 12 years before he was able to find a home. It is phenomenal in this day and age that we think it is acceptable that it could take so long. A lot of the state-run homes operate on a priority basis and single men are rarely the priority, even when they have additional issues.

What I am saying is that we have to look holistically at this. We cannot try to address just the homelessness; although, yes, we need to provide homes. We need the rehabilitation places so that people can get past their drug and alcohol dependencies and can try to live a more balanced life and address some of their mental health issues. These matters all come into place before we can find them a job because if they do not have stability by having a place to shower and get ready for work and a place where they feel comfortable within themselves, it makes it very hard to hold down any sort of job. We must have a holistic look at it. We have to look at the relationship issues.

As Hon Colin Tincknell mentioned, domestic violence is a big part of this. Early in my time in this place—I think it was within the first month or two—a woman called from the paddock. She called from the paddock because her husband was in the house and she could not go back there. She was suffering from domestic violence. She had a teenage child who needed ongoing medical support—and a horse and a dog. Somehow we were able to find people in the community in the regional areas who could manage all that, including somebody who drove over a couple of hundred kilometres to pick up her horse to take care of it somewhere else for her. People in regional communities are resilient. They figure these things out and they come up with good ideas. That is where I think this government needs to go. It needs to go out to those communities in the regional areas, see what is working and see what ideas are coming forward, whether it is from the council, from not-for-profits, from the community resource centres, even from within the few services that are out there. The government should find what ideas are out there and see what works for that community because not each community is the same; they are all different. They are very different from the metro area and they need support for the things that are working there.

Another matter I have spoken about a number of times is Just Home Margaret River. I am pleased it is getting some support from the local government as well as a bit through Lotterywest funding. It has a plan suitable for Margaret River, and maybe it could be used in other places. It is looking at what it needs now. It is even looking at some land there, which the Water Corporation may not need, to build a variety of accommodation for people who will be there for different lengths of time, to make sure that the homeless people in Margaret River have a place that suits them. Not all homeless people are the same. Some people do not mind sleeping rough on the pavement outside the shops and in doorways, while others would rather be out bush where there are no people around. We must look at the needs of homeless people. They are not all the same; they are very different and have many different requirements. To go out there and build them a home, which we should do—we should be able to provide some sort of accommodation—is not the end of it. Those people in our community still need help. I am one of those who believes that I cannot be lifted up and be in a better situation if around me people are suffering and struggling and do not have the support they need. I believe the opposite of that, which is that if we help those people and make sure that they have good health care, a good education, housing and opportunities for work, I will

Hon Colin Tincknell; Hon Alison Xamon; Hon Diane Evers; Hon Alannah MacTiernan; Hon Robin Scott; Hon Tjorn Sibma; Hon Kyle McGinn

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be better off as well. There is definitely a difference of opinion with a lot of people, but I feel that that is the way to go and that is what I will be working towards.

With homelessness in regional areas, the government should look to the communities to see what they are doing, to see what they need and to see what the needs of the people are. It is not a one-size-fits-all solution. Technology is moving along very quickly with artificial intelligence and analytics. We can start putting this data into the big black box and come out with not a one-size-fits-all solution, but something that says, “If you go into this area, look for these ideas and look for these sorts of things, this is what you might come across.” We can then tailor our response to that. We can do it; it is not rocket science.

The government should look to the regional areas and at organisations such as Pivot and Just Home that work holistically across all the different issues that people are facing, and not try to pigeonhole them and say, “Okay, you are fine. We have given you a home and so you are off the books—get started.” It will not work like that. However, if we all work together, we can come up with much better solutions. I look forward to the potential of the next parliamentary term, and even before the election, and having some good ideas coming forward. It will not be a short journey. We are in it for the long haul, but I need to believe that we can do it.

**HON ALANNAH MacTIERNAN (North Metropolitan — Minister for Regional Development) [10.48 am]:**

This is an important issue to bring before the chamber, but I think it is very disappointing that Hon Colin Tincknell has taken a script that I suspect has been provided to him by someone else and sought to make this a very partisan issue. All governments struggle with the issue of homelessness. None of us understands all the causes of homelessness; it is a very complex issue for which there clearly is no easy solution. Of course, that does not mean that one does not have to continue to try to work smarter and better on this issue.

**Hon Colin Tincknell** interjected.

**Hon ALANNAH MacTIERNAN:** I am happy to answer the member’s interjections. I know he was not happy to take any of my interjections, because I suspect he has no idea where the data in his speech actually came from.

There is no way that Minister McGurk, Minister Tinley or the Premier would suggest that this is not a serious issue; nor would the government suggest that all these issues have been solved, but we do have a clear pathway and we have over the past three years done considerably more than was done before we came to government. I will take some time to go through that.

I was particularly disappointed with the contribution made by Hon Diane Evers, a person I normally have regard for, in which she talked about how it is not just a case of one-size-fits-all, and how the government needed to talk to everyone. Minister McGurk has been absolutely assiduous in working to develop the government’s homelessness strategy. She has incorporated all the leading not-for-profit organisations into that strategy, in comparison with what Liza Harvey did when she was in government, which was to blame the not-for-profit organisations. We have brought the not-for-profits on board. The government’s homelessness strategy encompasses various programs and services, and it has been profoundly collaborative. It has included in its co-design many people who are, or have been, rough sleepers. The work that Minister McGurk has done cannot be faulted in terms of incorporating and developing consensus amongst the stakeholders on what needs to be done.

We agree that our homelessness strategy has not yet been fully laid out, but we were absolutely determined to get the model right and make sure that we knew the best possible way to address these issues. Just looking at some of the previous government’s data —

**Hon Colin Tincknell** interjected.

**Hon ALANNAH MacTIERNAN:** Sorry?

**Hon Colin Tincknell:** Surely you’re not going to read that.

**Hon ALANNAH MacTIERNAN:** No, I actually understand what I am saying, and I am going to refer to figures.

**The PRESIDENT:** Order! Minister, do not respond to interjections.

**Hon ALANNAH MacTIERNAN:** Okay.

In 2015–16, the expenditure on homelessness was around \$81 million. The government’s spending on homelessness in 2019–20 was \$93 million, on a range of specialist homelessness services, including crisis accommodation, housing support and outreach. This government is spending more than the previous government did on homelessness. We are putting considerably more resources into homelessness than the previous government did. That is the work that has been done to date, in addition to the homelessness strategy. Under the government’s Housing First initiative, we are providing rental assistance to, I think, 50 families. We understand that the cornerstone of our homelessness strategy is that housing needs to be addressed first and then the other complex issues that have caused people to become homeless in the first place, whether it is drugs, family violence or a challenging family upbringing, can be

Hon Colin Tincknell; Hon Alison Xamon; Hon Diane Evers; Hon Alannah MacTiernan; Hon Robin Scott; Hon Tjorn Sibma; Hon Kyle McGinn

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dealt with. We understand that people need a home first, so under the Housing First initiative we are providing 50 families across the metropolitan area with rental assistance to make sure that they have accommodation, and we are then working with them in detail to improve their outcomes. I think most members would agree that we need to do that.

In response to the idea that the government has gone backwards on social housing, I point out that since 2017 the government has invested more than half a billion dollars into social housing. When we came to government, we inherited some social housing stock that was in very poor condition—old, run-down housing stock that was no longer fit for purpose. Places such as Brownlie Towers were in severe disrepair and simply had to go. Through our social housing economic recovery package and our housing and homelessness strategy, we are fixing that. Late last year we announced our housing strategy and the Housing First part of the strategy is already underway. The other elements of the strategy are incredibly positive. We are investing \$35 million into two Common Ground facilities to help break the cycle of homelessness and give rough-sleeping Western Australians a place to call home. It is like the Housing First initiative, but in this case we are providing multilevel residential accommodation in East Perth. Included in that are all the services necessary for rehabilitation, to allow people to chart their path back to independence. The Common Ground model of supported housing is widely regarded around the world, and we are very pleased that one of those facilities will be built in Perth.

The Housing First initiative is also well suited for rollout in regional areas. As we look at the success of that initiative over the coming year, we can certainly look at ways we can take the model forward into regional WA. In addition to the half a billion dollars we have already spent on fixing degraded public housing that was no longer suitable, we have also committed \$125 million into 300 new public housing units for homeless and vulnerable people. There will be a further \$6 million to refurbish 20 regional and 50 metropolitan public housing properties. Importantly, \$19.2 million for 200 shared equity homes is to be delivered in partnership with Keystart.

Hon Alison Xamon talked about the drop in rental vacancy rates in Perth, and that clearly has been very strongly contributed to by the decline in housing starts. We have been very proactive in encouraging the housing construction sector. In particular, the work Minister Tinley has done over the last year in opening up eligibility for Keystart loans by reducing the amount of deposit required has been the first of a series of boosts that we are seeing turn that around. I think those of us who travel into the regions will have seen over the last month the rate at which new housing lots are being acquired and building applications going in. Although those people are not homeless, that helps create more housing stock going into the system and, of course, that helps to decrease housing stress generally. We anticipate that over the next year, there will be a very significant change in that regard.

There is no easy solution here, but, quite clearly, Minister McGurk has been working incredibly hard to develop a really comprehensive strategy in close collaboration. I think it is the sort of level of collaboration that certainly has not been seen in the not-for-profit sector before. She has certainly been putting very similar efforts into reducing domestic violence. I think the figures are a little ambiguous about the percentage of homelessness that is generated by domestic violence. Certainly, the figures suggest that among those seeking services, a very significant portion of homelessness is due to domestic violence. However, the causes of homelessness are probably far more diverse than that. We understand that domestic violence is a major issue and extraordinary efforts have been made to deal with the consequences of that and to develop a culture in which domestic violence is less likely to occur. It is really important that in that area we also focus on the cultural change necessary to address that issue more profoundly.

As I said, I am disappointed in the text of the motion. This is a very serious issue. I am a bit disappointed that someone on the crossbench has been prepared to take a page out of the Liberal Party hymnbook and not exercise a little independence, which I think is one of the benefits of having a crossbench. I am a bit disappointed in that. This is a very serious issue that government is putting in an enormous amount of effort into. I hope to see the member giving us full-bodied strength as we seek to put a fabulous Common Ground facility in place in East Perth. We are certainly looking forward to the member's support for this groundbreaking way of dealing with homelessness.

**HON ROBIN SCOTT (Mining and Pastoral)** [11.03 am]: Everywhere I go in my electorate I am told the same horror stories and hear the same complaints about the department of housing. It is on the back of these stories that I support Hon Colin Tincknell's motion.

I have spoken at great length about the suffering of Aboriginal people in the regions and about the suffering of residents in the regional towns having to put up with antisocial behaviour. The Department of Communities has a crucial role to play in getting things right. Unfortunately, I do not believe it has the guts or the ability to make a real change. The police in the Kimberley have told me that three departments have to get it right to make a difference when it comes to Aboriginal people—that is, housing, education and health. The police have said that if those departments can get those three things right, the police will barely need to become involved. I have no hesitation in saying that the government has failed miserably on health. It has certainly failed on education. I will not comment further on that because this motion is about homelessness and housing. Let us therefore look at the housing situation.

Hon Colin Tincknell; Hon Alison Xamon; Hon Diane Evers; Hon Alannah MacTiernan; Hon Robin Scott; Hon Tjorn Sibma; Hon Kyle McGinn

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I have a media release showing the \$444 million stimulus package for Western Australia. The bit that made me feel all warm and fuzzy was the \$390 million to build, buy, renovate and maintain social housing across the state. There are only four pages but I keep looking to see where it says that if tenants pay their rent on time for 12 months, they will get a trip for two around the world and \$50 000 spending money. I cannot find that anywhere in here, but I know along with these other promises—it has nothing to do with the campaign here—that it is in here somewhere.

**The PRESIDENT:** Member do you want to quote who that media is from and the date, just to assist *Hansard*?

**Hon ROBIN SCOTT:** It is a media release of 7 June 2020. I believe it was in *The West Australian*.

**Hon Alannah MacTiernan:** Was it offering trips around the world?

**Hon ROBIN SCOTT:** Yes. It has to be in here somewhere, along with the other promises. I cannot find it, but it will be in there somewhere, believe me.

**The PRESIDENT:** Member, as much as you want to have a lovely chat with the minister, I think you can direct your comments to me. Thank you.

**Hon ROBIN SCOTT:** Many Aboriginal kids are not safe living in state housing. Alcohol abuse is rife. Traditionally, the Aboriginal family is made up of clans—fathers, mothers, uncles, aunties, brothers, sisters and cousins and so on. Today we call them extended families. The extended family is very important in almost all Aboriginal cultures. We commonly hear the terms uncle, aunt and cousin when they are referring to their family. For Aboriginal people, this is really important for psychological and emotional wellbeing. For this reason, any person, not just a blood relative, can be called an uncle or an aunt and be considered family. In fact, some Aboriginal people in Kalgoorlie call me, a white Scotsman, “uncle” and I reckon that is the highest compliment I can be paid.

The problem is that sometimes these Aboriginal people betray their family and too often uncles under the influence of alcohol become the abusers of children in the family home—sexual abuse of girls and physical abuse of boys. These kids are not stupid; they know what is coming when Uncle Jimmy opens the next can of beer, so what do they do? They take off. They run away into the streets of the regional towns and that is where the problems start. They do not have a safe place to go and come from a background where abuse is accepted as the norm. It is no surprise that regional towns are constantly dealing with antisocial behaviour such as rock throwing at cars, burglaries or stealing—all those sorts of things. These kids are bored, angry and confused, but most of all, they are frightened—absolutely terrified. When antisocial behaviour starts, the police come along and pick them up and there is no place to take these kids. They have to be taken back to their home they have just fled from. What do they do? They jump the back fence and go straight back into the regional towns and the cycle continues. The government has done nothing for the last three and a half years I have been involved in this. These kids need somewhere to go. If One Nation is re-elected at the next election—hopefully, that will include me—we will be pushing to use existing facilities so the kids can get a clean, safe bed and a hot meal and, hopefully, some wraparound services in the same place.

But before everyone jumps up and down screaming “stolen generation”, these kids will have a choice to go to a safe place or back to the house where they have been threatened with abuse. It is about breaking the cycle. Every single person in the Pilbara, the Kimberley and Kalgoorlie tells me that it is getting through to the next generation. The current generation, the adults, are too far gone and that is wholly and solely the fault of this government and previous governments. As Hon Alannah MacTiernan said, “Let’s spread the guilt.” That is fine. As long as the Labor Party continues this ridiculous idea that throwing bucketloads of money to Aboriginal people and trusting that they have the expertise and the systems to dig themselves out of this quagmire that they are in, these problems will continue—and the Labor government is funding it.

The failure to provide safe housing for Aboriginal kids is the biggest failure of the McGowan government. The people of the regions will remember this in March next year. Although safety is a very important issue, it is not the only issue surrounding Aboriginal people. Travelling around the electorate, I have discussed with different people the housing provided by the state. A lot of Aboriginal people do not want the type of housing that they are being provided with. Most, particularly the ones coming in from the lands, would be more than happy to have a large roofed area with a fire pit in the middle so that they can sit around it and have a good yarn. This has been suggested by the Shire of Laverton. The shire has already mapped something out. It wants to get it done and all the shire needs is a bit of help from the state government to make it happen. It is the kind of dynamic solution that is out there. If the department bothered to go out into the regions and listen, they might learn something. In fact, I often wonder what the Housing Authority does in the regions.

One constituent who contacted the department about their priority housing status said to me, “I was treated like a piece of—beep”; members can fill that bit in for themselves. After hearing his story, I believe him. Another constituent contacted me because a plumber had attended their house six times in the last two months. Since December last year, the plumber had been called around for the same problem—burst pipes. The contractor who has the contract to do these repairs sent a letter to the department saying that these pipes will continue to burst until they



Hon Colin Tincknell; Hon Alison Xamon; Hon Diane Evers; Hon Alannah MacTiernan; Hon Robin Scott; Hon  
Tjorn Sibma; Hon Kyle McGinn

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are replaced. They have worn out because of wear and tear. But he has heard nothing back from the department. What makes it even worse is that another five houses have exactly the same issue. I cannot understand that, because in the 1980s and 1990s my small company had the Homeswest contract. That was run by an office in Meekatharra that was no bigger than a two-car garage. It had two people in it. The manager's name was Mr Russell Murphy and he had an Aboriginal woman assisting him whose name was Annette. They ran that place like a Swiss watch. We were given two hours for emergency breakdowns, seven days for a general repair, and 14 days if we had to examine something that was not working properly. We did that for decades and we never had any problems or complaints. I do not know what has happened in the last 20 years to the department of housing. In a separate incident, a Homeswest tenant passed away early in June. His family, who were living in the same house looking after him, contacted the department to advise that he had died. They were given one week to get out. They were told to get out on 24 June, the day before the gentleman was to be buried. They contacted the department of housing and, fortunately, the department came to its senses and put in place a temporary measure to allow these people to stay.

I do not think another department is as slow and inefficient, and spends as much taxpayers' money as the department of housing. Hon Alannah MacTiernan said that the department is spending hundreds of thousands of dollars doing maintenance. It just so happens that it appears to be the same maintenance job over and over! That is where the government is doing its dollars, ma'am. Until ministers are prepared to stand up to department officials, nothing is going to change, and that is really sad. I just wish some members in here could come along to the regions and see what is happening. A lot of the people in this chamber think that putting on their hiking gear, driving their Toyota Sahara up to Kings Park and going for a walk is going bush! They have got it all wrong.

**HON TJORN SIBMA (North Metropolitan)** [11.13 am]: Madam President —

**Hon Alannah MacTiernan:** I thought he was talking about you!

**Hon TJORN SIBMA:** I do not drive a Toyota Sahara.

**Hon Alannah MacTiernan:** I don't know anyone who does.

**Hon TJORN SIBMA:** I am not here to talk about these trivial issues. I want to, first of all, compliment Hon Colin Tincknell for bringing this matter to the house's attention, which he has done in his own way. He does not need me to defend his honour, but I do want to put this on the record. I have worked with Hon Colin Tincknell for about three and a half years on the Standing Committee on Estimates and Financial Operations. Over the course of that three and a half years, in my estimation he has proven to be a person of integrity and a person of his own mind. I have never known him, nor have I known any single member of the crossbench, the National Party or the Greens, to outsource their work to any other party. I have taken offence on his behalf, and actually on behalf of the entire chamber, at the suggestion that that individual is a mere cipher. The very fact that two members of the Greens stood in support of this motion and the terms in which this motion was moved indicates the significance of the issue. This is not mere petty politicking. I think it is very clear that we have a significant social issue confronting us. We are confronting —

**Hon Alannah MacTiernan** interjected.

**Hon TJORN SIBMA:** The minister has had her opportunity.

**Hon Alannah MacTiernan** interjected.

**The ACTING PRESIDENT (Hon Dr Steve Thomas):** Order, members! The member will be heard in silence.

**Hon TJORN SIBMA:** It is clear that we are presented with a problem that has magnified in scale and severity over the last three and a half years. It is a problem that is confronting us. It is a problem that each and every single one of us has probably tripped over, and I mean almost literally. People cannot go for a walk in the CBD at any time of the day or night, during the week or weekend, and not be confronted with the problem of homelessness. People cannot walk down Rokeby Road in Subiaco at two or three o'clock in the afternoon and not be confronted by the problem of homelessness. It is clear in our suburbs and towns; people cannot go to a suburban shopping centre and not see —

**Hon Darren West** interjected.

**Hon TJORN SIBMA:** Perhaps you need to open your eyes, champ!

People cannot go to a suburban shopping centre in metropolitan Perth and not be confronted with the problem of homelessness, nor avoid it in the towns in regional Western Australia. We are not here necessarily to affix blame, but we must test the government's claims—we must. I will take, in a charitable way, the strategy embarked upon by Hon Simone McGurk. The virtues of her consultation process were extolled by the minister representing her here, and fair enough. But I will make this observation: it is very good to get these consensus structures right, but what is obviously absent is the activity or the outcome of that consensus or process. If I can reflect somewhat

Hon Colin Tincknell; Hon Alison Xamon; Hon Diane Evers; Hon Alannah MacTiernan; Hon Robin Scott; Hon Tjorn Sibma; Hon Kyle McGinn

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unfavourably on the Labor DNA, it is that it actually puts priority on process and on talking things up rather than delivering results and walking the walk.

**Hon Pierre Yang** interjected.

**Hon TJORN SIBMA:** I am sorry; a succession of failures indicates that.

I want to reflect on this: the so-called attempt to be bipartisan and high-minded from this minister lasted for all of two minutes. She could not help but look back to the previous government.

**Hon Alannah MacTiernan** interjected.

**The ACTING PRESIDENT:** Order!

**Hon TJORN SIBMA:** The problem has magnified.

**Hon Alannah MacTiernan** interjected.

**The ACTING PRESIDENT:** Order, members! The debate has been held in a relatively congenial mode to date. Hon Tjorn Sibma, I will ask you to direct your attention to the Chair and concentrate on the motion, and members interjecting need to understand that their interjections are entirely unparliamentary and unacceptable.

**Hon TJORN SIBMA:** We have all been reprimanded and I will direct my remaining remarks accordingly.

I want to interrogate the common-ground policy announcement of the government. Every government comes along with an announcement—with a fix. We all appreciate, as adults and as seasoned political operators, that the problem of homelessness is multifaceted. Frankly, there is probably no top-down solution that will solve this issue forever. The issues are complex, bottom-up and multifaceted, and there are a lot of comorbidities. However, we must also be honest about the dynamics and details of the policy solutions that we bring forward. The common-ground approach, on its merits, is fine. The course of the debate has made it sound as though the government is actually actively addressing the issue, and to some degree it is. But my understanding of the common-ground policies is that the construction element will not even commence until sometime in the next financial year and that only 50 per cent of the accommodation will be allocated to homeless people. A second tranche of the program is undefined, both in scale and time frame. We cannot hang our hat, and nor should we, on these individualised and compartmented approaches to solving this problem and say, “No, we are solving the problem. We are working hard on this. Don’t worry; it’s going away.” There is a time lag. There has been a reduction in stock by, I think, 700 dwellings over the last three and a half years. There has been, depending upon what metrics are used, a reduction of between \$6 million and \$7 million per annum for homelessness services. There has also been a focus, unfortunately, which is in keeping with the way that this and Labor governments generally do business, on talking to the problem but not fixing it or delivering results. That is the burden of the Liberal Party in government. We are the people who actually deliver on things.

**Hon Darren West:** What a load of rubbish!

**Hon TJORN SIBMA:** Members might not like the truth. I think it is very fair —

Several members interjected.

**The ACTING PRESIDENT:** Order! I would reflect that Hon Tjorn Sibma should return to the substance of the motion before the house.

**Hon Laurie Graham:** Hear, hear!

**The ACTING PRESIDENT:** Again, interjections, including that one, are unparliamentary.

**Hon TJORN SIBMA:** I should probably come with my own trigger warning. This is clearly an important motion. I think that in the approach to solving the problem, the gentleman was talking about solutions.

Several members interjected.

**The ACTING PRESIDENT:** Order! That is enough. Hon Tjorn Sibma has the call.

**Hon TJORN SIBMA:** The honourable gentleman, Hon Colin Tincknell, brought on this motion in good faith. All it has done is poked the bear and provoked a disgoring of outrage and moral opprobrium.

**Hon Alannah MacTiernan** interjected.

**Hon TJORN SIBMA:** I just cannot understand it! Perhaps Hon Colin Tincknell has a point. Perhaps the government is protesting too much. Perhaps the government is embarrassed about its lack of performance. Perhaps the government actually knows the truth. The fact is that the Labor government has been a failure in this space for the past three and a half years. If its previous performance is any guide, this situation will get manifestly worse, and I worry about the consequences for everybody involved. I support this motion.

Hon Colin Tincknell; Hon Alison Xamon; Hon Diane Evers; Hon Alannah MacTiernan; Hon Robin Scott; Hon Tjorn Sibma; Hon Kyle McGinn

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**HON KYLE MCGINN (Mining and Pastoral)** [11.23 am]: I rise to speak on the motion brought to the house by Hon Colin Tincknell. I will reflect on Hon Robin Scott's speech. He touched on something that I have often thought about, particularly in the Northern Territory, and that is how we build housing, particularly in remote areas, for Indigenous Australians. There was a housing project in the Northern Territory that consisted of three-by-two houses, something like we would see in the city. Millions of dollars had been spent on them and within a couple of months a media crew went out and blew up a storm about how those houses had been destroyed. There was a kangaroo in the oven, the microwave had melted to the bench and there was a fire in the middle of the lounge room. I believe that if there had been a conversation beforehand, a different design would have been put forward, which is similar to what Hon Robin Scott said.

I spoke to Minister MacTiernan and learnt that that happened in the 1980s under a Labor government at Ninga Mia. From the minister's recollection, the media turned on that big time and said that those people were living in substandard conditions and that the government should have done better and built better housing. I think the media plays a big role in a lot of this stuff, as it does in all politics. However, I can say that I definitely agree with Hon Robin Scott in this space: there has to be a way that we can work closely with people to ensure that we provide appropriate housing, not just housing that we think people are going to fit into and change their lifestyle for. There is a better process in that space.

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, Bega Garnbirringu Health Service in the goldfields has been leading the way and doing an amazing job to combat the problems of homelessness and people who are rough sleeping. In particular, I recognise the work of Erica Cassidy, who created a task force to address homelessness and rough sleepers in the goldfields. It has been going for many months now. It was originally created to deal with the COVID-19 pandemic, but it has now brought together all the organisations—governments, departments and members of Parliament are involved—and stopped them working in silos. As a result of that collaboration, they are starting to work out where the gaps are and how we can fill them. Some of the great things that have resulted from that include identifying processes for how people are getting fed and gaps in short-stay accommodation where people can stay. It is also providing advice on how to access grants, particularly Lotterywest funding, which has changed due to COVID. I know that that approach has worked really well up in Carnarvon where we delivered over \$200 000 to the Food for the Mob program, which will provide more than 26 000 meals in the next six months, which is an amazing thing.

When we talk about homelessness—this is something I have not heard mentioned in this debate—one thing that we have to think about is who is doing it right. Who in the world is doing it right? I heard a sigh from behind me, but I am asking a genuine question: who is doing it right? The Northern Territory also has a large Indigenous population and we cannot turn around and say that it is doing it right. When I was living there, it also had issues with homelessness. I was interested in whether the member was going to put forward a case study or an example.

**Hon Colin Tincknell** interjected.

**Hon KYLE MCGINN:** I did not hear that today. No solution was put forward; it was just a blame game. All I heard during the member's speech was, "Blame, blame, blame." Had he come in here with a solution and put it on the floor, we could have had a proper debate. Instead, the member chose to score cheap political points, which is just disgraceful.

Several members interjected.

**The ACTING PRESIDENT:** Order, members! Hon Kyle McGinn is defending himself quite adequately without additional support from the sidelines.

**Hon KYLE MCGINN:** Thank you, Mr Acting President.

We need to realise that there are many issues that go with why somebody is homeless. We need to try to treat those symptoms as best we can early on, to give people more opportunities to not end up in that situation. I am proud of some of the things that the government has done in this space, particularly the family and domestic violence hub that is being set up in Kalgoorlie. It will be an amazing resource. The step-up, step-down facility to deal with mental health issues will be a place where we can start to treat the problems that create hardship for people and which, in turn, lead to them becoming homeless. We need to treat those things. The Target 120 program, which targets kids at risk, has also been rolled out in the goldfields region. It tries to help families to fix the problems that are happening at home. As Hon Robin Scott said, alcohol is a massive issue in my electorate, as I am sure it is in the broader Western Australian community. It is everywhere. I agree with Hon Robin Scott that alcohol is a big problem. We are running programs, and I am sure that past governments have run programs, but, again, is there a fix that is happening somewhere else that we need to look at? I am a big advocate of the banned drinkers register. We need to find a way of not just stopping people drinking but also assisting recovering alcoholics. That is something that we did not see with the welfare card program in the goldfields. It was introduced to try to stop gambling, alcohol abuse and everything else, but where were the wraparound services that should come with that? We would have been able to identify people with drinking issues through that process, but, instead, it was rolled out across all welfare

Hon Colin Tincknell; Hon Alison Xamon; Hon Diane Evers; Hon Alannah MacTiernan; Hon Robin Scott; Hon  
Tjorn Sibma; Hon Kyle McGinn

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recipients and everyone was tarred with the same brush, being called alcoholics and gamblers. It was not a successful program. I know that we are working on a trial of the banned drinkers register in the Pilbara. I have been talking to the minister about how that can be further rolled out. It is supported by many of the liquor outlets, the council and a lot of the leaders in the goldfields.

I conclude by saying that things are happening. I am very proud of Bega in the goldfields for taking a leadership role in that space. Erica is doing a great job. It is not always easy getting these organisations into the room; it can be quite a challenge. She is doing a great job, and the outcomes are definitely showing. Slowly, but surely, we will see some outcomes in that space.

**The ACTING PRESIDENT (Hon Dr Steve Thomas):** Hon Colin Tincknell, you would have had 15 seconds by the time you stood up. I think we will claim that the time for non-government business has expired.

Assuming that he has now caught his breath, Hon Matthew Swinbourn has a private members' business motion.

Motion lapsed, pursuant to standing orders.