



Government of Western Australia  
Office of Multicultural Interests



Our reference: 1268 / EOG-10-218

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Community Development and Justice Committee  
Legislative Assembly Committee Office  
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Dear Dr Gordon

**SUBMISSION TO THE COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT AND JUSTICE STANDING COMMITTEE'S INQUIRY INTO THE ADEQUACY AND FUTURE DIRECTIONS OF SOCIAL HOUSING IN WESTERN AUSTRALIA**

Thank you for the opportunity to provide this feedback to the Community Development and Justice Committee's inquiry into the adequacy and future directions of social housing in Western Australia.

The vision of the Office of Multicultural Interests (OMI) is an inclusive and cohesive society which draws on its cultural and linguistic diversity to enhance the social, economic and cultural development of the State. OMI's objectives are the full participation of culturally and linguistically diverse (CaLD) communities in social, economic and cultural life; removal of the barriers to equity experienced by CaLD communities; and promoting the benefits of Western Australia's cultural and linguistic diversity. OMI's strategic plan may be downloaded from its website: [http://www.omi.wa.gov.au/omi\\_plan.asp](http://www.omi.wa.gov.au/omi_plan.asp).

OMI made a comprehensive submission to the Social Housing Taskforce in December 2009, highlighting specific issues faced by CaLD communities in relation to social housing. Term of Reference 3 of the current inquiry by the Community Development and Justice Committee relates to the impact of public housing need on specific groups. These issues are addressed in OMI's submission to the Social Housing Taskforce.

I request the Committee to take into consideration the issues raised in the attached submission and the recommendations made by OMI to the Social Housing Taskforce as part of its current inquiry.

For further information or clarification in relation to this submission, please contact Ms Monika Schofield, A/Principal Strategy and Planning Officer, on 9217 1605 or by email at [Monika.Schofield@omi.wa.gov.au](mailto:Monika.Schofield@omi.wa.gov.au).

Yours sincerely

Maria Osman  
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR  
22 November 2010

**SUBMISSION TO THE  
DEPARTMENT OF HOUSING  
SOCIAL HOUSING TASKFORCE FINAL REPORT -  
'MORE THAN A ROOF AND FOUR WALLS'; AND  
'HOUSING 2020: FUTURE DIRECTIONS FOR AFFORDABLE HOUSING' STATEMENT**

Submitted by the Office of Multicultural Interests  
Department of Local Government

**December 2009**

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## SUMMARY OF RECOMMENDATIONS

### **OMI Recommendation 1**

The Department of Housing utilises the expertise of AHURI and other academic institutions in assessing the future demand for social and affordable housing, and the specific housing and support needs of humanitarian entrants and vulnerable CaLD communities are identified in this process and that all data should be collected, analysed and reported to identify the needs of CaLD groups.

### **OMI Recommendation 2**

Given the changing profile of people entering Australia through the Humanitarian Program, the Department of Housing adopts a flexible approach within the housing system to adapt to the differing needs of/within each intake.

### **OMI Recommendation 3**

The Department of Housing facilitates access to appropriate tenancy support services, including legal services, to suit the specific needs of humanitarian entrants, especially those from refugee background and vulnerable CaLD populations.

### **OMI Recommendation 4**

Education programs are developed for private sector providers to address negative stereotyping and discriminatory practices, drawing on the findings outlined in the EOC's 'Accommodating Everyone' report

### **OMI Recommendation 5**

With reference to SHT Recommendation 7 – that a formal review process and research be extended to CaLD populations and newer migrants, not only in terms of affordable housing but also in the necessary social support services and infrastructure necessary to sustain longer term settlement in non metropolitan areas.

### **OMI Recommendation 6**

As part of its development of tenancy support packages/services, the Department of Housing provides funding to the Integrated Services Centres (ISCs) to employ additional Multicultural Liaison Workers to respond to the unique housing support needs of humanitarian entrants.

### **OMI Recommendation 7**

In relation to providing counselling support for people with complex needs such as those with a humanitarian entrant background:

- the Department of Housing links with counselling service providers that have a proven track record in providing a timely and culturally appropriate service for people with a refugee background .
- counselling services providers should be trained and experienced in the delivery of torture and trauma counselling with proper understanding of issues faced by CaLD communities.
- where appropriate, torture and trauma counselling should be integrated into a holistic treatment approach involving co-ordination of advocacy services to ensure that the various psychosocial needs of refugees are met satisfactorily and in a timely manner, as per the ISC model.
- torture and trauma and psycho-educational information is provided to clients at an early stage to inform new arrivals of health risks and sources of support (as part of their housing support package)

#### **OMI Recommendation 8**

The Department of Housing develops a language service policy and provides appropriate information about the availability of interpreting services and the provision of an interpreter card across the 'housing continuum' where appropriate. This should incorporate:

- The right of any person who has limited proficiency in English to ask for an interpreter (as is the right for a client not to choose to have an interpreter if they are confident they are sufficiently proficient in English to proceed without one)
- Where possible, the choice of interpreter (given that people may feel more comfortable with one person rather than another. Although it is noted that this may not always be feasible or even preferable)
- A statement of an interpreter's responsibility
- recognition of NAATI accreditation and/or a formal qualification in interpreting and translation from an accredited tertiary institution.

#### **OMI Recommendation 9**

Housing services and support staff across the continuum, and front-line staff in particular, should be provided with information and training with regard to:

- how to identify the need for an interpreter
- the level of interpreter to be used in various situations
- how to engage an interpreter
- clients' right to request an interpreter
- the importance of pre-booking interpreters
- the availability of interpreter cards

**OMI Recommendation 10**

The Department of Housing identifies the need to provide cross cultural awareness training for all Housing Assessment and Housing Support staff, to ensure quality control in the delivery of services.

**OMI Recommendation 11**

The needs of Humanitarian Entrants, people with a refugee background and CaLD populations are considered specifically in the development of Local and Regional Housing Strategies.

**OMI Recommendation 12**

The Department of Housing promotes to local government areas the importance of utilising the expertise of relevant non government organisations, such as migrant resource centres, in the development of their Housing Strategies.

**OMI Recommendation 13**

The Department of Housing utilises OMI to ensure that the needs of CaLD populations are adequately considered and addressed where relevant in the development and implementation of a WA Affordable Housing Strategy.

**OMI Recommendation 14**

The Department of Housing identifies, and incorporates a statement of proposed action in relation to 'addressing the particular needs of vulnerable CaLD populations and providing specific support measures for humanitarian entrants and people with a refugee background', within any revised Future Directions Statement - and that such a priority is identified and addressed as part of a WA Affordable Housing Strategy.

## 1 INTRODUCTION

This submission is made to the Department of Housing in response to the Social Housing Taskforce Final Report "More Than a Roof and Four Walls", released on 6 October 2009, and to the accompanying 'Housing 2020: Future Directions for Affordable Housing' Statement. It has been prepared by the Office of Multicultural Interests (OMI), drawing on previous research and consultations across government and with a number of non-government organisations which provide services to humanitarian entrants and culturally and linguistically diverse (CaLD) communities.

The key purpose of the Office of Multicultural Interests is to lead Western Australian in achieving the full potential of multiculturalism. Underpinning this purpose is the vision of an inclusive and cohesive society which draws on its cultural and linguistic diversity to enhance the social, economic and cultural development of the State.

While this submission refers to Western Australians from CaLD and humanitarian entrant backgrounds, it should be noted that they should not be viewed or approached as a homogenous group, either between or within communities. While it is necessary to understand the common challenges and experiences that some people face, it is important that each person be recognised and approached as an individual, with unique and differing needs.

For the sake of brevity this submission has used the term 'vulnerable CaLD populations'. However, by using this terminology, it is not the submission's intention to suggest that people of CaLD backgrounds are inherently vulnerable or helpless. Rather, an attempt has been made to highlight some of the challenges faced by specific CaLD populations which have resulted in unique and complex needs, such as those from a humanitarian entrant background and senior citizens from a CaLD background. Thus, it is not necessarily a cultural or linguistic identity, nor diversity, which makes such people vulnerable; rather vulnerability can result from the (in)capacity of mainstream systems and society to respond to such needs and differences.

### 1.1 Office of Multicultural Interests Strategic Plan 2009-13

OMI's Strategic Plan 2009-13, which was launched on 28 May 2009, identifies three key objectives:

1. *Participation* - Full participation of CaLD communities in social, economic and cultural life.
2. *Equity* - Remove the barriers to equity experienced by CaLD communities.
3. *Promotion* - Promote the benefits of Western Australia's cultural and linguistic diversity.

The Strategies are each supported by three key actions which provide the basis for OMI's work and focus on three main areas:

- Public Sector - Facilitate CaLD engagement in government decision making processes, policies and programs.
- Empowering CaLD Communities - Provide CaLD communities with the information, skills and opportunities to support settlement, integration and citizenship.
- Western Australia - Facilitate strategic partnerships between CaLD communities, peak industry bodies, trade and consular sectors to enhance social and economic outcomes.

It is within this context that the Social Housing Taskforce (SHT) Report will be addressed, with a greater focus on terms of reference, proposed initiatives, and recommendations that may be particularly relevant to the unique needs of vulnerable CaLD populations.

## **1.2 Social Housing Taskforce Terms of Reference**

The Social Housing Taskforce was asked to provide advice to the Minister for Housing on how to expand the supply of social housing and consider as part of its deliberations:

- 1) National and international models of social housing financing and provision which may be applicable to Western Australia (supported by evidence which is comparable and reliable)
- 2) Strategies to increase the participation of the community housing sector, not for profit organisations, the private sector and local government in the provision of, and management of, social housing.
- 3) The long term role of the State within a modern social housing framework considering aspects including the provision of dwellings, management of tenants, management of waitlists, regulatory frameworks, and provider of partnership based funding.
- 4) Strategies to improve the optimisation and utilisation of current public housing stock.
- 5) Funding models that identify new and innovative approaches to long term sustainable funding including the investment of private sector capital.
- 6) Methodologies to underpin demand modelling and the setting of appropriate long term targets for the level of social housing provision.
- 7) Observations regarding the capacity of the public, private and community sectors to support the new approaches identified by the Taskforce, and ways in which this capacity can be enhanced, if required.

This submission broadly addresses the themes of Terms of Reference 2), 3), 6), and 7) in particular.

## **1.3 Social Housing Taskforce Proposed Initiatives**

Of the proposed SHT initiatives aimed at achieving an additional 20,000 social and affordable housing units by 2020, the following are the themes predominantly referred to in this submission:

- Implementation of a whole of government approach to the provision of social and affordable housing through development of a State Affordable Housing Strategy. This Strategy will clearly outline the roles, responsibilities, key initiatives, funding and performance measures that will underpin the development and delivery of affordable housing across Western Australia over the next 10 years.
- Local Governments to develop local housing strategies that identify the future affordable housing needs of their communities.
- Introduction of the One Affordable Housing System which includes a Housing Needs Register which provides a detailed assessment of an applicant's immediate and longer term housing requirements, inclusive of support service needs, and facilitates the applicant into an appropriate housing solution along the continuum.
- Developing, funding and implementing Housing Plans for current and future public housing tenants, focussing on stabilising their tenancies and plans for their transition through the affordable housing continuum.



## **RESPONSE TO SOCIAL HOUSING TASKFORCE REPORT**

<b>2</b>	<b><i>Question 1) Taskforce Recommendations: Are there aspects of the Report you feel are problematic or particularly important, and if so why?</i></b>
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### **2.1 'Understanding the Current and Future Need for Social and Affordable Housing in Western Australia' (Chapter 2, SHT Report)**

This chapter emphasises the importance of first understanding the complex and multi-faceted need for social and affordable housing in Western Australia, in order to ensure that the nature and level of response is appropriate.

In relation to understanding housing need as a basis for developing a state-wide Affordable Housing Strategy, it is emphasised that the unique and specific needs of humanitarian entrants and CaLD communities should be considered in any attempts to forecast future need for social and affordable housing. Furthermore, it is agreed that public housing waiting lists are hardly adequate to provide insight into future housing needs, which will be influenced by social, economic and demographic changes

Rowley and Ong's (2009) study, commissioned by WA Council of Social Services (WACOSS) and highlighted in the SHT Report, outlines a number of important issues which this submission would like to highlight, including:

- the importance of understanding the variations in demographic, economic, social and housing market characteristics between different regions, towns and areas within cities. From OMI's perspective, this would include understanding and analysis of the needs and issues relating to specific humanitarian entrant populations and CaLD communities locally;
- acknowledging 'housing need' as an important independent measure alongside 'housing stress'. This would facilitate the identification of housing needs of people who live in affordable housing which is unsuitable (ie in terms of quality, overcrowding and/or location). It would also capture those not able to access certain types of housing. This is certainly the case for many humanitarian entrants or CaLD populations, who may have larger families and have limited access to appropriate housing;
- the need to collect, analyse and report primary data which reflects the economic and social development of the community in estimating housing requirements. This submission agrees with the notion that a detailed housing needs assessment is necessary to appropriately assess the housing requirements of a specific location and community;
- the significant impact of short term factors such as rising unemployment on the need for social housing assistance over the next few years. Nevertheless, it is important to consider that a climate of unemployment does not affect communities, families and individuals equally. Rather, groups such as humanitarian entrants, for example, may be more vulnerable to unemployment in a challenging economic climate, due to limited (or unrecognised) qualifications, limited English proficiency, and possible mental health issues resulting from torture and/or trauma experienced in their country of origin, or from living in a refugee camp over a long period. The impact of unemployment on such families may also be severe, where there may be a larger number of dependent children who are already experiencing barriers to settlement.

### **Housing Needs of Specific Demographic Groups: Humanitarian Migrant Households (SHT Report, Section 2.5.2)**

OMI is pleased to note that the Taskforce Report has identified humanitarian migrant households as an example in which the 'careful consideration of particular client groups is needed when determining the type of housing that should be provided in particular areas' (p.25). This includes the need to build larger houses to accommodate the significant proportion of larger humanitarian migrant households (clearly contrasting with mainstream housing need as identified in the Report), and the consideration of settlement trends of humanitarian migrants across local government areas.

**SHT Recommendation 4**, that 'the Department of Housing maintains a specialised construction program for larger homes that caters for the housing needs of larger households', is therefore strongly supported.

This submission also supports the SHT Report's statements that:

- housing demand 'is often exacerbated by the difficulty that both Aboriginal and migrant households have in accessing suitable accommodation in the private rental market, with the lack of large houses, high rental costs and discrimination often cited as barriers' (p.27). This is consistent with the Equal Opportunity Commission's (EOC) inquiry into issues of discrimination in the private rental market, and resulting 'Accommodating Everyone' (2009) report;
- 'broader demographic trends only form part of the picture and that a full housing needs assessment in each region or area must consider the specific nature of housing need in the community' (p. 27);
- 'The Department of Housing should utilise the expertise of AHURI and other academic institutions in assessing the future demand for social and affordable housing' (p.29).

**OMI Recommendation 1:** The Department of Housing utilises the expertise of AHURI and other academic institutions in assessing the future demand for social and affordable housing, and the specific housing and support needs of humanitarian entrants and vulnerable CaLD communities are identified in this process and that all data is collected, analysed and reported to identify the needs of CaLD groups.

The following recommendation is strongly supported:

**SHT Recommendation 6:** 'The Department of Housing immediately develops a sophisticated demand model for the provision of social housing in Western Australia, which considers longer term economic, demographic and social trends affecting low income households'.

The proposed considerations in developing the new Demand Model, as outlined in the SHT Report (pp. 29-30), are also supported. This includes 'using demographic information to ascertain the demand for and housing needs of specific client groups such as Aboriginal people, migrant groups, and people with disabilities within each region' (p.30). Current demographic information, however, should be complemented by a more complex analysis and forecasting of housing and support needs of such groups, as per OMI Recommendation 1.

### **Background to the Housing Needs of Vulnerable CaLD Populations.**

The SHT Report briefly identifies some of the housing and support needs of 'Humanitarian Migrant Households' (Section 2.5.2), pertaining to the 'Housing Needs of Specific Groups'. This includes the lack of larger houses to accommodate larger family structures, lack of

supply of affordable rental properties, and barriers in access due to racism and discrimination. Nevertheless, it is the aim of this submission to draw greater attention to the complex issues confronting vulnerable CaLD groups, such as humanitarian entrants, in order to promote a deeper understanding of their needs of this cohort, particularly in the context of establishing a state-wide affordable housing system.

The following is a summary of housing and support issues/needs facing humanitarian entrants, as identified by the 'Across-Government Working Party on Settlement Issues for African Humanitarian Entrants' Final Report (June 2007) and in the 'Settlement Issues for Humanitarian Entrants in Western Australia' Implementation Report (April 2009). It should be noted that, while these reports refer to African humanitarian entrants in particular, many of the issues raised are experienced by all humanitarian entrants.

### **Brief Demographics**

A consultation process aimed at identifying issues and priorities in relation to the settlement of African humanitarian entrants was conducted in 2005 by the Across Government Working Party on African Humanitarian Settlement Issues (the Working Party). Since these consultations, the composition of the Australian Government's Humanitarian Program has changed significantly. From a high of 73 percent in 2004-05, the percentage of humanitarian entrants arriving from Africa has steadily decreased: 56 percent in 2005-06, 52 percent in 2006-07 and 30 per cent in 2007-8. The program now comprises equal allocations for the Africa, Asia and Middle-East regions. In 2007-08, refugees from the Middle-East and southwest Asia made up 35 percent of the program, people from the rest of Asia 34 percent and people from Africa 30 percent. In 2008-09, Africa, the Middle-East and Asia were each to be allocated a 33 percent intake.

As stated previously, those humanitarian entrants who are replacing the African cohort, including those who originate from Burma, also have high and complex needs that require attention. In addition the particular needs of humanitarian entrants, such as the needs for housing for larger families, will continue for many years after arrival.

### **Client Profile of Humanitarian Entrants**

The Working Party's consultation process revealed a range of complex and unique needs confronting humanitarian entrants, including:

- vulnerability to risk factors such as unemployment, poverty, racism, and social exclusion
- past experiences of torture, trauma and war
- displacement from home country
- years living in a refugee camp
- health problems – due to inadequate health care & malnutrition
- grief and loss – due to separation from, and loss, of family members
- high educational/literacy support needs
- culture shock.

These needs are in addition to the considerable risk factors that affect migrants in general, such as unemployment, poverty, experiences of racism and social exclusion.

One in four African refugees who come to Australia have been tortured and seven in ten have had traumatic experiences such as losing a loved one in violent circumstances<sup>1</sup>. Most have experienced displacement from their home country due to war and spent years in refugee camps, with significant health problems resulting from limited access to health care and malnutrition. Often compounding their trauma experiences is the separation from family members and the uncertainty of their safety.

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<sup>1</sup> Warrnambool City Council, (2005) 'A Warrnambool Welcome: Learning from the Warrnambool Migrant Relocation Project' Vic Health

Humanitarian entrant students from Africa in particular as well as elsewhere often have high educational support needs. Most arrive with little or no formal schooling experiences, limited literacy in their first language and often no exposure to written language. Many students have also witnessed or experienced acts of torture, rape and murder, which can significantly inhibit their ability to engage in a meaningful learning program. OMI has been advised that many young people have been child soldiers and are in need of rehabilitation. Life experience of the students is limited, as most were born and raised in refugee camps.

The majority of African humanitarian entrants experience the impact of torture and trauma accompanied by culture shock. This has a flow on effect to all aspects of health and wellbeing. Frequent physical expressions of emotional distress in torture and trauma victims are common. The nature and level of torture and trauma experienced by refugees requires specialist knowledge and skills that are not ordinarily available through mainstream service providers. Torture and trauma counselling for refugees is a specialist area of work and the demand for services by the general community already exceeds the available resources.

Culture shock, isolation, lack of confidence and low self-esteem further contribute to the trauma experienced by refugees. Consequently, humanitarian entrants may have high needs, not only in relation to education and health, but also in areas of independent living and financial management. The cultural distance between their home culture and the Australian culture is significant and ranges from learning what foods to eat to understanding welfare and banking systems.

It is important to note that, while many humanitarian entrants (particularly those from Africa) may have high and complex needs, this may not be the case for all. Thus an informed and responsive housing system is required to cater for these differences. It is equally significant that the benefits of a diverse population be acknowledged. Humanitarian entrants bring with them a strong sense of community and work ethic, and collectively demonstrate an eagerness to find meaningful employment and to improve not only their own lives and those of their children, but also those of the broader community. Promoting such benefits will be an important step in overcoming racism, discrimination and other barriers faced by such communities.

**OMI Recommendation 2:** Given the changing profile of people entering Australia through the Humanitarian Program, the Department of Housing adopts a flexible approach within the housing system to adapt to the differing needs of/within each intake.

### **Housing Needs of Humanitarian Entrants**

Consultations carried out by the Working Party found that African humanitarian entrants were experiencing difficulties in securing housing, including discrimination. These included lengthy waiting times for government housing and barriers to accessing private housing, such as cost, referees and racism. Furthermore, as recognised by the SHT Report, African humanitarian entrants are generally disadvantaged in accessing government housing due to the lack of homes to accommodate the large families common to this group (families of ten are not uncommon). Some families have resorted to leasing two separate dwellings to house their larger sized families. Unless housing issues are properly addressed, African humanitarian entrants are at risk of homelessness and related social issues.

Although the Commonwealth Government's Integrated Humanitarian Support Strategy (IHSS) provides initial accommodation for humanitarian entrants on arrival until they are placed into a six-month lease, limited accommodation services are provided beyond this time. Consultations revealed that many humanitarian entrants were experiencing difficulty

securing private housing after their initial six-month lease expired. There have been anecdotal reports of systemic racism in the private housing sector towards leasing homes to African humanitarian entrants. Humanitarian entrants also often do not have access to referees that are required as part of the application process for private rental. Such challenges are consistent with the findings of the EOC's 'Accommodating Everyone' report.

Additionally, many refugees do not have the current skills to care for properties. The IHSS contract includes training in tenancy skills, however; new arrival leases expire after six months and most problems occur after this time when there is no easily accessible support.

### **Housing and Related Legal Issues**

An African Legal Service was established in Victoria in 2007 to provide targeted legal services to arrivals from Africa. The 'Out of Africa and into Court: the legal problems of African refugees' report (2009), based on the advice and casework of the first 18 months of the Service, identifies some of the most common legal problems experienced by humanitarian entrants. The following is an extract from the report, relating to their housing and related legal needs:

"We saw several clients, and received many more queries, regarding housing. Clients came to the African Legal Service seeking assistance with a variety of housing issues, including the following:

- Homelessness and support in finding accommodation.
- Appealing decisions (e.g. that the client did not qualify for emergency housing) made by the Office of Housing.
- Questions about a "notice to vacate" a property.
- Questions about the landlord's right to sell a property, and a landlord's right to arrange inspections of the property for prospective buyers.
- Questions about a landlord's responsibility to repair a property, and the tenant's ability to withhold rent if the property is not repaired.

Unfortunately, many problems that people wanted help with were not strictly *legal* problems. They were *housing* problems arising from a tight rental market and lack of public housing. We saw several clients who simply wanted our help finding them a property. We received many more phone calls and requests for information about how to find a rental property. We generally referred people to a housing service or a settlement agency for assistance and support.

The legal questions relating to housing spring from unfamiliarity with the procedures and laws around renting residential property. This ignorance leads to people struggling to maintain private rental. For example:

- Most people who have just arrived in Australia are not aware of the need to complete a detailed condition report when they enter into a lease, or may not be able to do so because of poor writing skills. If people do not complete a condition report, they are vulnerable to landlords who may seek to recover their rental bond to pay for pre-existing damage.
- Some people are reluctant to make complaints to the landlord about the rental property, because they fear losing the property; others make complaints but do not follow up if the landlord does not act. Some clients had withheld rent because they believed they had a right to do so until repairs were made.
- Because of the difficulties with debt and budgeting described in the section on debt, some clients fail to pay rent on time. They immediately become vulnerable to receiving a notice to vacate.

- Because of the difficulty of renting, some people have agreed to subletting arrangements. These leave the tenant vulnerable to above-market rents charged by the subletter, tenancies that can be terminated without notice, and substandard living conditions that the subletter fears to address because they don't want to lose their home<sup>2</sup>

The Service also cites problems of Humanitarian access to legal services and the lack of expertise within community legal centres to represent clients in housing and tenancy matters.

**OMI Recommendation 3:** The Department of Housing facilitates access to appropriate tenancy support and other services, including legal services, to respond to the specific needs of humanitarian entrants with the aim of providing seamless and coordinated services beyond the IHSS period as well as to vulnerable CaLD populations.

**OMI Recommendation 4:** Education programs are developed for private sector providers to address negative stereotyping and discriminatory practices, drawing on the findings outlined in the EOC's 'Accommodating Everyone' report.

### **Regional Settlement and Housing**

The EOCs 'Accommodating Everyone' report identified that 93 percent of the humanitarian entrants who have arrived in Western Australia since 2002-03 are still located in the Perth metropolitan area: the Stirling local government area houses approximately 42 per cent, with Canning and Wanneroo housing a further ten per cent each.

A lack of infrastructure, facilities, service provider networks and trained agency staff make regional settlements in WA difficult. Adequate infrastructure would need to be put in place prior to any move to systematic regional settlements. The State Migration Strategies may provide direction in terms of directing secondary movements towards regional areas offering employment opportunities and meeting skills shortages.

It is noted that there are no existing non-metro settlement regions in WA and that outlying regions of the metropolitan area are a more logical starting point in WA to be promoted as settlement areas before targeting rural areas. However, limitations exist in relation to the lack of proximity to services in these areas.

Nevertheless the Department of Housing may wish to consider the potential benefits of focusing on affordable housing and support in non-metropolitan areas for people of CaLD backgrounds where appropriate infrastructure and local services exist or can be put in place. Such benefits could include:

- access to cheaper housing than in metropolitan areas (if there is stock);
- an opportunity to alleviate potential over-crowding and demand for housing in metropolitan areas;
- increased ease of settlement for clients familiar with living in rural environments;
- potential for more intensive support to be provided to clients in less-populated areas; and
- alternate employment options.

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<sup>2</sup> Footscray Community Legal Centre (June 2009). *Out of Africa and into Court: the Legal Problems of African Refugees*

**SHT Recommendation 7** states that: The Minister for Housing and Works establishes a formal review and research process to focus on improving the supply of affordable housing in the regions, inclusive of the housing requirements of Aboriginal people.

**OMI Recommendation 5:** With reference to SHT Recommendation 7 – that any formal review process and research be extended to CaLD populations and newer migrants, not only in terms of affordable housing but also in the necessary social support services and infrastructure necessary to sustain longer term settlement in non metropolitan areas.

## **2.2 Moving to an Affordable Housing Continuum: Modernising Social Housing in Western Australia (Chapter 4, SHT Report)**

In relation to the housing system in WA, it is noted that the SHT wishes to redefine the way housing is viewed and delivered. This includes a change in the role of the Department of Housing, incorporating:

- a focus on an affordable housing continuum, as a system traversing the complete range of housing tenures, from crisis accommodation to affordable home ownership
- a shift in thinking to an affordable housing continuum which has suitable entry, transition and exit points that facilitate the movement of clients during their housing careers
- the provision of properly funded and effective support services for social housing clients, which will significantly enhance their opportunity to transition through the housing continuum
- an increased capacity of a wide range of organisations, from the private (eg. real estate agents) and NFP sectors, to be involved in referring or even assisting clients to be lodged on the Housing Needs Register (enabling housing providers across the spectrum to become 'one stop shops' for those seeking affordable housing solutions)
- a change of focus and culture within the Department of Housing at all levels to move from a provider of housing to a provider of housing services
- the development, by the Department of Housing, of an affordable housing system by June 2011, which is underpinned by a Housing Needs Register that assesses the housing needs of all applicants and directs them to appropriate housing options (SHT Recommendation 18)

Any measures taken by the Department of Housing that result in improved coordination and provide responsive, targeted and appropriately funded housing and support services, are strongly supported by OMI.

**SHT Recommendation 24**, that the Department of Housing maintain the existing Bond Loan Assistance Scheme, is also supported.

Nevertheless, there are areas of concern in relation to the Department of Housing's proposed new direction which this submission would like to draw attention to, including:

- the current absence of an adequate housing and support continuum for humanitarian entrants, with transition points between the Commonwealth's Integrated Humanitarian Support Strategy (IHSS) and sustainable, coordinated housing support offered beyond this time. For many humanitarian entrants, the current experience of transitioning through the housing continuum begins with a move from crisis accommodation in the form of a refugee camp, to brief intensive supported accommodation offered through the IHSS for 6-12 months and then directly into the private rental market with all of its barriers including access, affordability and discrimination. Transitioning into and out of the public housing

system is not the reality for most humanitarian entrants who are prevented from accessing public housing due to long waiting lists, despite their need for intensive support. This places more pressure on transitional support services such as ISCs<sup>3</sup>, given the need for humanitarian entrants to acquire the necessary life skills to access and maintain tenancies and to successfully and confidently integrate into the community.

- the notion that it is optimal, or indeed possible, for most clients to progress through an 'affordable housing continuum' with home ownership being the preferred result. Primary attention should instead be paid to achieving positive outcomes for individuals, families and communities – with a more holistic focus on supporting outcomes such as secure and appropriate housing, family cohesion, employment and education. This is particularly significant for vulnerable populations such as humanitarian entrants and recent migrants in relation to long term settlement issues and in climates of high housing stress and need.
- the possibility of inconsistent service delivery and varying capacity of agencies to respond appropriately to vulnerable populations, with the increased involvement of the private and NGO sectors; this includes their new roles as 'one stop shops' for housing services, and in tenancy management. As the primary department responsible for overseeing a new WA 'housing system', the Department of Housing would need to ensure that all housing and service delivery agents are able to deliver consistent, culturally- and language-appropriate services. Such services should be underpinned by: appropriate funding and access to resources; an in-depth understanding of the unique needs of vulnerable CaLD populations (including the most appropriate housing and support options); and culturally competent staff.

### **2.2.1 Improving Support Services to Social and Affordable Housing Tenants: (SHT Report, Section 4.5)**

This submission strongly supports the SHT's view that:

- *the support needs of social housing clients must be assessed and addressed in order for a tenancy to be successful.*

For groups with special needs such as humanitarian entrants and vulnerable CaLD populations, it is noted that targeted support may be necessary at different entry points in the 'housing continuum', as outlined above.

- *some social housing tenants may require additional assistance, ranging from low level support such as regular check-up visits by the tenancy manager and financial counselling to intensive support by outsourced services that help the household to sustain their tenancy and avoid eviction. This may include brokering links to mental health services and aged care support assistance.*

For people from a humanitarian entrant background, this may also include access to: specialised torture and trauma counselling, appropriate language and translation services (as referred to in the WA Language Services Policy 2008 (LSP) – see below), and legal services. The ISCs described below offer a holistic approach to service delivery, including a Multicultural Community Liaison Worker (MCLW) general settlement services role. The MCLWs have reported that assisting clients to access affordable private rental accommodation is increasingly becoming the most time consuming and significant part of their role.

One example which illustrates such wide-ranging support needs includes MCLW support offered to a Kirundi single mother with three children who required: housing assistance (in terms of property viewing, assistance with filling in tenancy applications, verification of property condition reports, and advocacy with the property manager to extend the lease

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<sup>3</sup> Please refer to Section 4 for further background regarding OMI's Integrated Services Centres (ISCs)



and recover the bond); food parcels and assistance with bills; assistance with registering her child into a mainstream school; support with linking with mainstream services such as the bank; and support with Centrelink issues. In this real-life case, 15 sessions were required with the MCLW.

- *support packages/services need to be adequately funded, accessible and appropriate and should be started at the commencement of a tenancy, for example, or when a client is on a waiting list.*

Targeted early intervention is necessary to avoid chronic problems from escalating and to prevent evictions from occurring. It is therefore clear that holistic and integrated service models, such as the ISCs, should be adequately promoted, supported and funded to assist humanitarian entrants in accessing and sustaining their tenancies and integrating into the wider community. Building capacity within a model such as the ISCs to meet the current demand for housing assistance should therefore be considered a priority in the development of housing support packages and services.

This submission supports **Recommendation 25**, that the 'The Minister for Housing and Works commits to adequately funding support services for people in the social housing system to assist in sustaining tenancies' (in particular) and 'in moving people through the affordable housing continuum' (where appropriate). It also supports **Recommendation 26**, that the Department of Housing identifies the support needs of current public housing tenants to assist with the development of individual housing plans', recognising that this will further assist vulnerable groups with unique needs.

Nevertheless, this submission further recommends that, as part of its development of tenancy support packages/services, the Department of Housing takes advantage of the existing ISCs and provides funding to employ additional MCLWs to respond to the unique housing support needs of humanitarian entrants.

**OMI Recommendation 6:** As part of its development of tenancy support packages/services, the Department of Housing provides funding to the ISCs to employ additional Multicultural Liaison Workers to respond to the unique housing support needs of humanitarian entrants.

**OMI Recommendation 7:** In relation to providing counselling support for people with complex needs such as those with a humanitarian entrant background:

- the Department of Housing links with counselling service providers that have a proven track record in providing a timely and culturally appropriate service for people with a refugee background;
- services such as torture and trauma counselling should only be provided by people trained and experienced in the delivery of such services with a proper understanding of issues faced by CaLD communities.
- where appropriate, torture and trauma counselling should be integrated into a holistic treatment approach involving co-ordination of advocacy services to ensure that the various psychosocial needs of refugees are met satisfactorily and in a timely manner, as per the ISC model;
- torture and trauma and psycho-educational information is provided to clients at an early stage to inform new arrivals of health risks and sources of support (as part of their housing support package).

## **Interpreting Services**

Western Australia is in the unique position of having the most culturally and linguistically diverse population in the country, with more than 27% of our population born overseas and with approximately 270 languages, including Indigenous languages, spoken. In order for housing and services to be accessible to the WA population, language barriers of all varieties must be overcome.

## **Western Australian Language Services Policy 2008**

The State Government's Language Services Policy (LSP) is developed and overseen by OMI. The revised LSP 2008 was endorsed by the Premier and Minister for Citizenship and Multicultural Interests (as well as the previous Government's Cabinet). The LSP contains:

- definitions and competencies for Translators and Interpreters (T&Is)
- Language Services Principles
- minimum standards for using Interpreting and Translating Services
- Guidelines and practical instructions for implementing the LSP, including:
  - commitment to using competent interpreters and translators
  - when interpreters and translators 'must', 'should' or 'may' be used
  - how to determine the need for an interpreter
  - how to access and use interpreting and translating services
- Questionnaire for determining if an Interpreter is required
- Decision Tree for engaging an Interpreter
- Rights and responsibilities of parties in a communicative discourse
- Countries and main languages used.

OMI distributes the Western Australian Interpreter Card and provides advice and referral to government agencies in relation to the LSP and the use of T&I. OMI has produced three flyers to support the LSP 2008 which are on the OMI website:

1. How to use an interpreter (on site).
2. How to use a telephone interpreter.
3. Frequently Asked Questions for Public Sector Agencies.

OMI is currently developing a communications strategy to promote the LSP to CaLD communities and the NGO sector. OMI has also used various forums, such as the OMI convened WA Across-Government Network, to promote and explain the LSP.

Individual agencies, such as WA Health and WA Police, are in the process of revising their agency specific language services policies using the State Government's LSP 2008 as a guide.

**OMI Recommendation 8:** The Department of Housing develops a language service policy and provides appropriate information about the availability of interpreting services and the provision of an interpreter card across the 'housing continuum' where appropriate. This should incorporate:

- the right of any person who has limited proficiency in English to ask for an interpreter (as is the right for a client not to choose to have an interpreter if they are confident they are sufficiently proficient in English to proceed without one);
- where possible, the choice of interpreter (given that people may feel more comfortable with one person rather than another. Although it is noted that this may not always be feasible or even preferable);
- a statement of an interpreter's responsibility
- recognition of NAATI accreditation and/or a formal qualification in interpreting and translation from an accredited tertiary institution.

Information can be conveyed via:

- translated brochures/flyers (to be made available for downloading from an appropriate website);
- posters; and
- bi-lingual workers.

It should be noted that, for some language groups, translated information is not appropriate, such as where there has historically only been an oral tradition. Thus, the provision of oral information is an essential part of a holistic communication strategy.

It should also be noted that T&Is may also be necessary for older, more established, CaLD citizens, particularly those who are losing their English proficiency and reverting to their original language as they age.

**OMI Recommendation 9:** Housing services and support staff across the continuum, and front-line staff in particular, should be provided with information and training with regard to:

- how to identify the need for an interpreter
- the level of interpreter to be used in various situations
- how to engage an interpreter
- clients' right to request an interpreter
- the importance of pre-booking interpreters
- the availability of interpreter cards.

OMI wishes to emphasise the importance of ensuring that people with limited English proficiency, including humanitarian entrants, Indigenous Western Australians and the hearing impaired, are informed of their rights to an interpreter under the LSP across the new WA housing system.

### **Cultural Awareness Training**

OMI is currently investigating a Cultural Competency Training Package tailored to suit WA public sector needs. Other organisations already offer specialist training in this area. Such training, which differs from Aboriginal cultural awareness and equal opportunity and racial discrimination training, is an important tool in the delivery of appropriate housing support to CaLD communities.

**OMI Recommendation 10 :** The Department of Housing ensures that all Housing Assessment and Housing Support staff are provided with cross cultural awareness training to ensure the appropriate delivery of services.

### **Review of Services for Humanitarian Entrants**

In the context of establishing a new affordable housing system in WA, with appropriate and targeted support services, this submission also draws attention to the findings of the Lost in Transition Performance Review, conducted by the Western Australian Auditor General in 2008. The Review was established to determine whether:

- agencies plan for humanitarian entrants and if services were effectively coordinated; and
- humanitarian entrants access state services and if the services were effectively delivered.

The Review focused on the extent to which mainstream service providers understand and adapt their delivery approaches to humanitarian entrants, and assessed how communication,

physical and other obstacles are addressed in mainstream services.<sup>4</sup> It focused on the Department of Health, Department of Education and Training and the Department of Housing and Works (DHW), now Department of Housing. The Review also assessed overall coordination and therefore included the Office of Multicultural Interests (OMI) due to its policy, education and coordination roles relevant to humanitarian entrants. The Equal Opportunity Commission was consulted as the approach was also informed by the State Government's Policy Framework on Substantive Equality.

The Review found that:

- Humanitarian entrants have complex needs which if not addressed could have serious social and economic consequences for them and the State.
- Agencies have limited information on how humanitarian entrants use their services and whether they are effective.
- Humanitarian entrants may not be identified as 'at risk' in mainstream services until significant problems arise.
- A 2006 State Government review by the Across Government Working Party on African Humanitarian Settlement Issues had raised concerns but, so far, few of its recommendations have been implemented.
- There are examples that show how approaches to service delivery can be changed to improve access.
- Humanitarian entrants face difficulties in getting services because:
  - agencies have not adequately addressed language and literacy obstacles, and considered what is the most effective service delivery approach;
  - the inflexible application of policies and criteria can prevent humanitarian entrants from getting the most appropriate service; and
  - there is a lack of coordination between agencies in providing services to humanitarian entrants, making access to services more difficult.

The Review made seven recommendations. They were that agencies should:

1. improve their information on humanitarian entrants' service needs, usage and service effectiveness to support planning and service delivery;
2. review, in consultation with other agencies, the most effective way of providing access to state government services for humanitarian entrants;
3. increase learning between services and agencies on which approaches deliver services most effectively to humanitarian entrants;
4. have appropriate strategies to address language and literacy obstacles faced by humanitarian entrants;
5. ensure agency policies and guidelines on using an interpreter are up to date and provide regular training to staff in working with an interpreter and cultural awareness;
6. identify services where accessibility and effectiveness may be improved through more flexible application of policies or program criteria; and

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<sup>4</sup> It covered people who arrived after 2001, were granted permanent residency in Australia while living overseas, and so were eligible for State services immediately on arrival. This included visa subclasses for Refugees, Women at Risk and the Special Humanitarian Program (sponsored entrants) and excluded those who applied for refugee status while in Australia.

7. develop a more coordinated approach to the planning and delivery of state government services to humanitarian entrants including opportunities to relocate or collocate.

The African Implementation Committee report, 'Settlement Issues for African Humanitarian Entrants in WA' (2009), outlines the Government's response to each of the Working Party report's recommendations. The Department of Housing was represented on both of these committees. In 2009, OMI also convened a "Lost in Transition" Working Group, comprising relevant government agencies (including the Department of Housing), to develop a coordinated response to the Auditor General's recommendations. Many of the ongoing areas of concern raised by such reports and committees in relation to the needs of humanitarian entrants have been highlighted by this submission.

It is important to re-emphasise that, despite the growing understanding within Government of the unique and complex needs of humanitarian entrants, access to affordable and appropriate housing remains a primary critical issue. Any reform of the WA housing system should therefore incorporate and respond to the knowledge that already exists in relation to this population group. This includes drawing on the expertise of other agencies who deal directly with such clients, including the Department of Education, the Department of Health and a range of NGOs; these agencies could be called upon to provide advice as to the most appropriate types and levels of support required. However, it would be important for vulnerable CaLD populations, such as humanitarian entrants, to be clearly identified as a group with potentially high and complex needs as part of the Department of Housing's reform process.

### **2.3 'Working in Partnership with the Private and Non-Government Sector to Attract Finance for Social and Affordable Housing' (Chapter 5, SHT Report)**

It is understood that attracting investment in social and affordable housing by the private and not for profit (NFP) sectors is a key strategy toward creating sustainable and affordable housing across the continuum. This may involve greater involvement by the community housing sector with respect to ownership of housing assets and in tenancy management.

As already stated, if the Department of Housing is to promote a new suite of housing options and services, attention should be paid to consistency of service delivery across service providers, including ease of access and capacity to respond to the unique needs of clients.

### **2.4 State Government Housing Policy and Leadership (Chapter 6, SHT Report)**

The SHT has recommended that: 'The Minister for Housing and Works leads the State Government in the adoption of a whole of government State Affordable Housing Strategy that clearly outlines its priorities and plan to ensure the provision of housing that will accommodate the population of Western Australia over the next 10 years (SHT Report, Recommendation 35).

This submission supports the aim of a State Affordable Housing Strategy, which is to address affordable housing systemically, overcoming the barriers of uncoordinated service delivery and inconsistent information across the government, organisations and communities. However, specific consideration should be given to the needs of Humanitarian Entrants, former refugees and vulnerable CaLD populations in the consideration of demand and supply of housing, and the development and delivery of policies and services.

The SHT has also made the following recommendations in relation to the development of local and regional government strategies:

- **Recommendation 37:** Metropolitan Local Governments develop Local Housing Strategies that use agreed population projections to identify the future housing need of their community and set clear targets and objectives for the achievement of housing numbers, types and tenures.
- **Recommendation 38:** Regional Local Governments work together with appropriate regional bodies and stakeholders to develop Regional Housing Strategies that use agreed population projections to identify the future of housing needs of their communities and set clear targets and objectives for the achievement of housing numbers, types and tenures.

OMI supports the development of Local and Regional Housing Strategies with the aim of understanding the specific and unique housing needs of local communities and identifying ways to address them. OMI further recommends that people from CaLD backgrounds, particularly humanitarian entrants, are considered specifically within such needs analyses and strategies. To assist in this, the Department of Housing should promote to local government areas the importance of utilising the expertise of relevant non government organisations, such as migrant resource centres, in the development of their housing strategies.

**OMI Recommendation 11:** The needs of Humanitarian Entrants and people with a refugee background and CaLD populations are considered specifically in the development of Local and Regional Housing Strategies.

**OMI Recommendation 12 :** The Department of Housing promotes to local government areas the importance of utilising the expertise of relevant non government organisations, such as migrant resource centres, in the development of their Housing Strategies.

#### **WA 'Implementing the Principles of Multiculturalism Locally' guide for local councils**

A current OMI initiative, which would complement such local government housing strategies, is the development of a guide for local councils aimed at assisting them to implement the principles of multiculturalism in a way that best suits the unique needs of their local CaLD communities, and to incorporate these into existing planning and reporting processes. The guide is expected to be completed by July 2010 and will be distributed to every local government authority in WA. Following its publication, the Department of Housing could promote its use amongst LGAs as a tool to help develop their local and regional housing strategies.

### **2.5 Department of Housing's Role in Leading the State Affordable Housing Strategy (Chapter 7, SHT Report)**

It is understood that the Department of Housing will be working across government in the development of a State Affordable Housing Strategy over the next 12 months. Given OMI's role in leading Western Australia in achieving the full potential of multiculturalism, OMI is keen to work with the Department of Housing to ensure the needs of Western Australians of CaLD backgrounds are adequately considered and addressed where relevant.

Such a partnership approach in the development of a State Affordable Housing Strategy is underpinned by OMI's Strategic Plan, which includes specific actions aimed at supporting the public sector to achieve substantive equality for people of CaLD backgrounds. These actions include: providing strategic advice and information on multicultural issues; facilitating interagency collaboration in policy development and service delivery; and identifying barriers and providing information and advice on their removal. Such actions complement OMI's objective of removing the barriers to equity experienced by CaLD communities.

**OMI Recommendation 13:** The Department of Housing utilises OMI to ensure that the needs of CaLD populations are adequately considered and addressed where relevant in the development and implementation of a WA Affordable Housing Strategy.

**3. (Question 2): Proposed Future Directions Statement – Are there aspects of the Future Directions statement you feel are problematic or particularly important, and if so why?**

It is understood that the Future Directions Statement is the initial 'blueprint' for a WA Affordable Housing Strategy, drawing on the findings of the SHT report, and that a more detailed Affordable Housing Strategy will be developed in the coming year. The support provided for many of the proposed measures identified by the SHT, and the key areas of concern identified by this submission, have equal relevance to the Future Directions statement and the development of a detailed Affordable Housing Strategy.

It is of particular concern that Reform Theme 4 – Improve Support and Transition Incentives (Future Directions Statement) does not currently address the needs of vulnerable CaLD populations such as people from a humanitarian entrant background. It is noted that the particular needs of Aboriginal people are identified in this section of the Future Directions Statement, and this is strongly supported by OMI. However, as outlined in this submission, specific measures aimed at assisting other Western Australians with specific and complex needs is required. For this to occur, it is necessary that vulnerable CaLD populations are identified as a priority group.

**OMI Recommendation 14:** The Department of Housing identifies, and incorporates a statement of proposed action in relation to 'addressing the particular needs of vulnerable CaLD populations and providing specific support measures for people from a humanitarian entrant background, within any revised Future Directions Statement, and that such a priority is identified and addressed as part of a WA Affordable Housing Strategy.

**4. (Question 3): Other Issues and Solutions – Do you feel there are other measures or practical proposals that should be considered to address the affordable housing challenge?**

**Integrated Services Centres (ISCs)**

Models of service delivery that coordinate services, target the needs of a specific group and focus on integration can be highly successful in delivering effective culturally appropriate services that do not duplicate, yet alleviate pressure on, existing services. Such models can also assist in successful and sustainable transitions across the housing continuum. Relevant to the integration of housing and support services. OMI's ISCs are an example of an innovative and successful model of coordinated service delivery for humanitarian entrants.

In March 2007, in response to the complex needs of African humanitarian entrants, OMI launched an integrated model of service delivery in partnership with the Departments of Health and Education. The ISCs are a one stop shop addressing the most critical needs of humanitarian entrants. They are located at Parkwood and Koondoola Primary Schools and provide services to students who attend the schools' Intensive English Centres (IECs).

The target group for the project is humanitarian entrants, including adults, young people and children, who are beyond the six-month eligibility period for access to the Commonwealth Government's Integrated Humanitarian Settlement Strategy (IHSS) managed by the Department of Immigration and Citizenship (DIAC). The ISCs effectively fill the gaps in service delivery left by the IHSS and DIAC's Settlement Grants Program.

Services are provided by a mix of government and non-government agencies and include mental health specialists, Multicultural Community Liaison Workers and Community Health Nurses. Services to humanitarian entrant children are enhanced through the integrated model, access to school psychologists and the ability to address the needs of children within the context of the family group.

The success of the model was identified in an evaluation of the pilot project by Edith Cowan University and underscored by an acknowledgement of its merits in the Western Australian Auditor General's Performance Review *Lost in Transition: State Services for Humanitarian Entrants*.

The Western Australian Auditor General's report, *Lost in Transition: State Services for Humanitarian Entrants*, commended the ISCs as an effective model of coordinated service delivery:

*"Integrated Services Centres (ISCs) are an example of services from several agencies and NGOs have been colocated at two of the schools humanitarian entrants attend when they first arrive.... Staff provide community liaison and psychological, health and other care that students and their families need at one location. This enables families to more easily access multiple services, and the agencies to better coordinate those services for those families"*<sup>5</sup>

The evaluation of the ISC pilot project carried out by the Edith Cowan University also found the ISCs to be a successful model for inter-agency cooperation:

*"The evaluation found that the Project provided a successful example of cooperation between government and non-government agencies, working together from one site and that it provides a model for the role of government and non-government agencies in future initiatives. The Project has brought together several agencies that previously worked autonomously. The Project management role by OMI of the Project has been successful"*.

The evaluation quoted a provider who observed:

*"One of the problems with any project like this is the ownership. You can have silos and it's very difficult to get government agencies and non-government agencies to work together. This has been an outstanding success on that basis because of OMI's ownership of the program"*<sup>6</sup>

A significant benefit of the ISCs is that they provide an effective and coordinated service delivery model with a primary focus on children which differentiates it from other programs and service providers which tend to target parents when addressing the needs of families. The State Government has approved funding to continue the ISCs up to 30 June 2011.

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<sup>5</sup> Western Australian Auditor General (June 2008) *Lost in Transition: State Services for Humanitarian Entrants*, p.25

<sup>6</sup> Edith Cowan University (March 2009) *Evaluation of the Integrated Services Centres Pilot Project*, p.23 unpublished



**5. (Question 4): General Suggestions – Are there more general matters you think need attention in the proposed Affordable Housing Strategy and why?**

This submission has drawn attention to some of the key areas the Department of Housing should consider in its development and implementation of a state Affordable Housing Strategy. Nevertheless it is important to highlight the substantial work that has been, and is being, done to identify and address the housing and support needs of humanitarian entrants and vulnerable CaLD populations. Some of this significant work has involved collaboration between OMI, the Department of Housing, and other agencies, including involvement in:

- *Commonwealth-State Inter-agency Settlement Group* – focusing on specific settlement issues and information sharing between Commonwealth and State agencies.
- *Accommodating Everyone Working Group* – responding to the recommendations contained in the EOC's 'Accommodating Everyone' report, which focused on issues of discrimination in the private rental market.
- *African Implementation Committee* – formed to respond to the recommendations of the Across Government Working Party on African Humanitarian Settlement Issues.

The Department of Housing has also received specific advice with regard to the service and support needs of vulnerable CaLD populations, through:

- *Review of Housing Service Delivery (2007-08):*  
The review identified a number of service delivery areas requiring improvement, including matters related to CaLD clients, and was conducted by the Department of Housing and Dr Nola Kunnen of the Alcoa Centre for Stronger Communities, Curtin University of Technology.
- *Housing Focus Groups (2008):*  
Focus group sessions were conducted in response to the Auditor General's inquiry into the service needs of humanitarian clients, and included key persons and agencies involved in settlement of humanitarian or refugee applicants from CaLD backgrounds. Focus groups were led by Dr Casta Tungaraza (Murdoch University – Australian Academy of Race Relations), who was contracted by the Public Housing Directorate.

It is also noted that the Department of Housing has engaged in a number of activities in relation to CaLD groups, as part of its implementation of the Substantive Equality Policy Framework.

It is important however that such prioritisation, knowledge and activities form part of a future integrated and coordinated Affordable Housing Strategy for WA. Incorporating these components into WA's new housing system will be integral in ensuring improved outcomes for vulnerable client groups, such as humanitarian entrants and former refugees. Specifically, this would support a movement towards the full participation of CaLD communities in social, economic and cultural life and the removal of barriers to equity experienced by CaLD communities. It should be recognised, however, that drawing on WA's culturally and linguistic diversity will have significant reciprocal benefits in terms of the social, economic, and cultural development of our State.