

Council on the Ageing (WA)

Submission to the Standing Committee on Estimates and Financial Operations (March 2022)

Inquiry into the Financial Administration of Homelessness Services in Western Australia

Introduction

Council on the Ageing Western Australia [COTA (WA)] is the peak body for vulnerable seniors and supports an active and positive approach to ageing, while identifying new opportunities for this cohort. It has been recognised that older people (65 and older) are the fastest growing segment of the population and there has never been a better time to influence positive ageing as we move through 2022 and beyond.

Homelessness has become an issue for Western Australian seniors as the pressure of finding and maintaining suitable, affordable accommodation continues to mount. COTA (WA) is constantly reminded of the difficulty being faced by WA Seniors regarding accommodation when looking at issues impacting their physical and emotional wellbeing.

Older people at risk of or experiencing homelessness including older single females, have been identified as a priority cohort by COTA (WA) and as such need to be understood and considered for specific attention.

Focus of this Submission

COTA (WA) will focus on the second point raised by the Committee in its correspondence dated Wednesday 8 December 2021 addressed to the Chief Executive Officer Ms Christine Allen, that being:

'All Paths Lead to a Home' Western Australia's 10-Year Strategy on Homelessness 2020-2030

Over many years, COTA (WA) has provided direct input to recent reports such as the *'One Rent Increase From Disaster Older Renters Living on the Edge In Western Australia'*. Summary Report - J. Fiedler and D. Faulkner - August 2019. This report identified that between the 2011 and 2016 census there was a 16% increase in homelessness in WA for those aged 65-74 and that this trend is likely to increase due to our ageing population. The report further identified that over 12,000 people in Western Australia aged 65 and over were experiencing housing stress, paying more than 30% of their income in rent for housing that is insecure, unaffordable and may not be adaptable as they age.

This submission will identify the critical facts as we know them and will raise funding considerations which we believe will address directly or in-directly homelessness issues.

COTA (WA) will not attempt to examine or comment on the financial administration of homelessness services as we do not possess the resources to do so.

Critical Facts and Concerns

- There are currently 18,388 households (32,967 people) on the WA public housing waitlist with 3,762 households on the priority list (7,603 people) 31 January 2022.
- The Australian institute of Health and Welfare data for 2020-2021 indicates that one in 109 Western Australian received homelessness assistance (24,500 people).
- On any given day in Western Australia, 65 requests for assistance from specialist homelessness services are not met.
- Research by the University of New South Wales has identified a current unmet need of 39,200 social and 19,300 affordable homes across Western Australia. If we continue the same trajectory, it has been estimated that by 2036 WA will have a shortage of 86,400 social and 32,000 affordable homes.
- Despite the identified demand, total social housing stock declined in WA over the last four (4) years.
- The National Older Women's Housing and Homelessness Working Group identified that between the 2011 and 2016 Censuses, there was a 31% increase in homelessness among older women.

Funding Opportunities in Western Australia to Reduce Homelessness

Note: The following questions should be asked (by the Inquiry) to ensure that financial administration of homelessness services in Western Australia are able to meet critical needs of older Western Australians.

1. Have homelessness data sets specifically for older single women in Western Australia been funded to capture necessary data for policy development and future funding proprieties?
2. Are data sets for people living in regional, rural and remote areas, Veterans and LGBTIQ+ cohorts funded to provide data for evidence-based policy and funding priority purposes?
3. To what extent has funding been provided to de-stigmatise and normalise the provision of housing specifically for short to medium term homelessness given the public perception that such accommodation will attract anti-social behaviour?
4. To what extent have research projects been funded using lived-experience cohorts to develop policy and funding priorities to reduce homelessness in Western Australia?
5. Has funding been provided (if so, how much) to assist older people to plan for their accommodation needs as they age, and their needs and priorities change over time?
6. Have specialist services been funded and provided, to assist older people to navigate their way to a housing solution avoiding the risk of homelessness?
7. Has funding been provided to identify data sets to determine the number of older renters with limited or no property assets facing the real prospect of homelessness as they age?

Acknowledgement

COTA (WA) acknowledges the input of Shelter WA for the data provided for this submission.