



Dr David Worth
The Principal Research Officer
Education and Health Standing Committee
Legislative Assembly, Parliament House
PERTH WA 6000

Dear Dr Worth

Submission to the Inquiry into the Adequacy and Appropriateness of Prevention and Treatment Services for Alcohol and Illicit Drug Problems in WA

Please find enclosed the Department of Housing's submission. The submission refers to term of reference (b) regarding the most appropriate way to ensure integrated care. It responds to matters relating to social and other determinants of drug use; outstanding needs and gaps in services and how to respond to them; and considerations for future government investment.

The Department appreciates the opportunity to make a submission.

Yours sincerely

Steve Parry
A/Deputy Director General

10 August 2009

Submission by the Department Of Housing to the Education and Health Standing Committee Inquiry into the ‘Adequacy and Appropriateness of Prevention and Treatment Services for Alcohol and Illicit Drug Problems in Wa.’

August 2009

EDUCATION AND HEALTH COMMITTEE
LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
PARLIAMENT OF WESTERN AUSTRALIA

To inquire into the adequacy and appropriateness of prevention and treatment services for alcohol and illicit drug problems in Western Australia, with particular reference to:

- (a) the evidence base, content, implementation and resourcing (including teacher training) for health education and other interventions on alcohol and illicit drugs for school-aged students;
- (b) the evidence base, adequacy, accessibility and appropriateness of the broad range of services for treatment and support of people with alcohol and drug problems and their families, and the most appropriate ways to ensure integrated care; and
- (c) the adequacy of the current education and training of medical and allied health professionals in the alcohol and drug field.

The Department of Housing wishes to present a submission regarding the second of the three terms of reference: ‘*...support services for people with alcohol and drug problems and their families and the most appropriate way to ensure integrated care.*’

The Department of Housing will provide comment and advice on the following three matters as they relate to the above (second) term of reference:

- Social and other determinants of drug use,
- Outstanding needs and gaps in services and how to respond to them,
- Considerations for future government investment.

CURRENT SITUATION

As some types of homelessness are associated with addictions, and an estimated 5-10% of tenancies are affected by chronic or acute drug or alcohol problems, the need for support services for these persons is important to the Department. The situation is especially acute and concentrated in remote and regional settings such as Halls Creek, Derby, and Roebourne (*further information is provided in a Background Paper on Remote Area Housing Services attachment one*).

The Department of Housing currently supports public housing rental tenants who have alcohol and illicit drug problems by reducing their rent to \$10.00 for three months (Rent to Income Policy s 12) while they attend a rehabilitation program where rent or lodgings are paid (Rent to Income Policy s 12.1).

This enables the tenant to afford the cost of the program and ensures their accommodation remains available after they exit the program. Discretion can be applied to extend the three month timeframe if this is required.

The Department also provides through the Supported Housing Assistance Program (SHAP) services for tenants in danger of being evicted. Preliminary evidence from contracted non-government service providers such as Centrecare, Anglicare, and Mission Australia indicates as least 50% of these clients have alcohol and/or illicit drug problems. (Attachment Two provides further information on this: '*Background Paper on Tenancy Support and Eviction Prevention Services.*')

Alcohol or illicit drug addiction are currently seen to be obstacles to being accepted as a suitable applicant for a tenancy and are also factors which can threaten the stability of a tenant in occupation.

PROPOSED SOLUTION

Integrated service and housing models have already been extensively used in the prevention and treatment of clients and tenants with mental illness. This type of model could also be used for people with drug and alcohol addictions.

The coupling of support services prior to application or as part of the priority application process for housing would enable a segment of the waitlist to be dedicated to applicants with families or individuals who are overcoming alcohol or illicit drug addiction.

At the moment data on these life factors are not collected or measured, and are usually hidden from the housing needs assessment process. Tying in funding from alcohol or illicit drug addiction prevention or treatment services with either short-term accommodation or long-term housing solutions would work to stabilise the client and their family's lives, meet their need for shelter and provide another place in which prevention or treatment services could be delivered.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- I. The primary response advocated by the Department of Housing is that IF prevention and treatment services are integrated with accommodation and related support services THIS can lead to long-term housing solutions and prevent relapse into previous addictions.
- II. Tying new funding for support services from the Commonwealth and the State with additional resources for the provision of housing will set this course of action on track.

ATTACHMENT ONE: *Background Paper on Remote Area Housing Services*

The Department of Housing provides housing and housing services and essential services for remote and town based Aboriginal communities across Western Australia. The majority of the funding is through the Council of Australian Governments National Partnership Agreement on Remote Indigenous Housing with \$496 million committed for Western Australia until 30 June 2013.

The Department currently provides services to over 130 communities with over 2,600 houses and provides power, water and waste water management and maintenance services in 91 communities. An average of \$25 million per year is used to upgrade power, water and waste water services in 91 communities as part of the National Partnership Agreement funding.

Maintaining housing in remote communities and town based communities in regional centres is a challenge. Use and abuse of alcohol and other drugs impacts on the house through increased damage and wear and tear often linked to violence.

One example is Halls Creek where the Department has been the lead agency for the Halls Creek Better Life Project. The first phase for the Department of Housing has been to construct additional housing for Government employees and community members as well as working through a repairs and maintenance program to lift the quality of housing.

Members of the Halls Creek community had repeatedly called for action to address abuse of alcohol and other drugs. The community identified a paucity of alcohol and other drugs rehabilitation and support programs.

In 2008 alcohol restrictions were introduced. The police and other agencies are reporting reductions in alcohol related issues. For housing, it is too soon to effectively assess the overall impact in terms of decreased expenditure on repairs and maintenance.

For housing, the key link is between tenant support services and effective clinical and counselling programs to assist tenants in working through their substance abuse issues. The Commonwealth funding provides for new housing, upgrading existing housing as well as repairs and maintenance. The Commonwealth does not provide for tenant support services.

The WA Government provides an amount of \$13 million per year that is used to provide housing management services including tenancy agreements, inspections and rent collection. A small amount is available to provide tenant education and support services. However, to provide an effective link between the tenant and the professional support and counselling services as well as assisting with basic hygiene and money management to maintain a healthy house, additional resources are required.

ATTACHMENT TWO: *Background Paper on Tenancy Support and Eviction Prevention Services*

Alcohol and Illicit Drug Problems

Supported Housing Assistance Program services in the metropolitan area have indicated that at least 50% of the tenants referred to the program have a combination of alcohol and/or illicit drug problems. These problems impact on their daily living skills and functions affecting the family and the community (e.g. anti-social behaviour). These services primarily address tenancy support, property standards, debt management and other related issues and refer tenants to alternative specialised support services as required for life-issues such as addictions.

History

The Supported Housing Assistance Program (SHAP) has operated since 1991 with the aim of supporting tenancies that are experiencing difficulties in maintaining a tenancy due to rental arrears, property standards, antisocial behaviour or a combination of these issues.

Rationale

Safe and appropriate housing is essential to the well being of all people, without adequate and safe housing, people are at risk of homelessness and this can impact on their health and consequently lead to them being unable to make the most of education, training and employment opportunities that will help them and their families get on in life.

The Department of Housing recognises the important role it plays in the prevention of homelessness and is working with other government and non-government agencies to continually improve the services it provides to assist at risk clients avoid possible homelessness.

Homelessness

Homelessness is not just a housing problem. Homelessness has many drivers and causes, including unstable and insecure accommodation, domestic and family violence, long term unemployment, mental health issues, substance abuse and family and relationship breakdown.

Investing in support services to prevent and reduce homelessness delivers benefits not only to those vulnerable and at risk of homelessness but also to the entire community. The Department of Housing supports the primary provider of homelessness services, the Department for Child Protection, in providing housing after immediate needs for accommodation are dealt with.

Tenancy support services provided

Contracted non-government services provide supported housing assistance in a case management model to tenants referred by the Department of Housing to enable them to fulfil their obligations and responsibilities as tenants.

Each service is expected to provide a holistic approach to deliver supports to individuals and to link referred client/s to appropriate alternative supports to enable the client to manage a public housing tenancy.