



SUBMISSION

To

The Principal Research Officer

Community Development and Justice Standing Committee

Legislative Assembly

Parliament House

PERTH WA 6000

From

Schizophrenia Fellowship Albany & Districts Inc

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This submission will focus on the needs of people who have a Mental Illness, as this is our core business. We provide support on a daily basis , through our facility , to people with severe mental illnesses, their carers and families. It will address Inquiry Terms of Reference 3, 7 and 9.

Housing is consistently identified as a priority area where few gains have occurred, shortages are increasing and the situation is critical.

Safe, affordable housing is a basic right which is frequently difficult to achieve and maintain by our clients. They are often unwell with lengthy hospital admissions as a result. Their low incomes, (the majority receive a form of Centrelink benefit) is a significant barrier to renting privately. Housing requirements exist along a continuum for people with mental health problems. From hospitalisation to intensive residential support to various forms of independent living, people need to be able to move along this continuum without jeopardising security.

For many, tenure of housing is jeopardised through lack of options, flexibility and support. In order to achieve and maintain housing tenure, people with mental health problems:

- Must feel secure and safe in their physical and social environment.**

- **Require accessibility and proximity to social, cultural and family networks, carers, shops, support services ,medical and alternative treatment programmes, recreation options ,transport, amenities and community services that assist people with mental health problems to maintain tenure.**
- **Must be properly heard and responded to if housing is to be maintained.**
- **Require secure tenure that is sufficiently flexible to allow people to move between housing and support options and/or location without loss of continuity of care and tenancy.**
- **To have reasonable choice without disadvantage has special significance for people who have already experienced alienation, discrimination and isolation.**

Albany has a severe shortage of affordable, appropriate social housing and the models that are being offered are not what we know our clients need.

Fellowship House would like to see supported accommodation complexes built. Cluster housing in small to medium complexes is seen as a viable option for providing independent living, whilst reducing social isolation and maintaining stability and well being. These purpose built homes or units would have staff on hand to assist clients with activities of daily living. Few cluster homes are

presently operating, but feedback from consumers is positive. There appears to be widespread support for an increase in the establishment of cluster housing models. People who are not acutely ill, but who remain unwell and are on large doses of anti psychotic medications cannot maintain themselves and their homes without assistance. This assistance often falls to their parents and families who are financially, emotionally and physically stretched beyond their limits.

Within this service we are aware of a client who lives in a small van, moving from place to place each night, another who could not find housing for many months and was forced to share a room in a Backpackers Hostel with the frequent change of roommates this entailed. Another person was hospitalised for seven months as there was no accommodation available for her. This is a large cost to the taxpayer and ties up a hospital bed.

Albany's population is increasing each year but the Government's provision of social housing in this area is not keeping pace with the increased demand.

As well as Albany, we are aware of the same needs in Denmark, Katanning and Mt Barker.

The wait list for public housing in this area has increased by about 20 per cent in the past eighteen months, and people on the priority list are waiting for over a year for housing.

For someone with a mental illness this wait can be catastrophic , and they are frequently moved to Perth, away from family and support networks.

Thank you for giving us the opportunity to comment on Social Housing in Rural Western Australia.

References.

Shelter WA Housing Needs of People Affected by Mental Health Problems.

Council to Homeless Persons Victoria Homelessness Strategies in Australia.

Mental Health Council Of Australia “ Out Of Hospital, Out Of Mind.”