

Dr, Hilda Turnbull, MB. BS.

Your ref: 36-07454

Hon Brian Ellis,
Chair,
Standing Committee on Environment and Public Affairs,
Parliament House,
Perth, Western Australia.

12 September 2012

Dear Mr Ellis,

Petition No 137- Emergency Accommodation for the Homeless

Thank you for your letter dated 23 August inviting feedback on the responses from the Minister Housing and the Minister for Community Services; Women's Interests; Youth.

The information supplied by both Ministers is extremely brief and focuses mainly on capital works and services to be constructed and conducted in the future. It is difficult to ascertain exactly what is being done in the next few years as there is a mixture of time frames and little clarity or separation of exactly what finances are Western Australian budget allocations. (separate from the Federal government contributions). There is no detail on the total number of emergency accommodation beds currently available for primary homeless or accommodation units for secondary and tertiary homeless people or the projected need in the future.

I will address each question and suggest some very relevant questions to which I could not find answers.

In your opinion to what extent will the Government initiatives have an impact on homelessness in Western Australia.

The proposed capital works and services highlighted in the Ministers replies are all going to be valuable in assisting homeless people. The long term integrated strategy of services assisting homeless people and creating more affordable housing stock is a move in the right direction.

It is my impression that the Not for Profit sector, NFP, Housing Authority and Community Services personnel are all working to deliver services and emergency accommodation which is providing a reasonably good outcome for those people who can get into the systems.

Despite this the number of people who do not have secure accommodation and fall into the category of homeless, primary, secondary or tertiary is increasing. There are a large and increasing number of people who are unable to access the accommodation and the services linked with the accommodation.

This is well known to the people who signed the petition through their personal experiences.

It is documented in the *People turned away from government funded specialist homeless accommodation 2010-2011* Report and presented in evidence for the *Legislative Assembly Report; A Fading Dream, Nov 2011.*

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The letter from the Department of Child Protection dated 4 April 2012 provided data from Census 2006. The 2006 census showed there were about 13,400 homeless people in Western Australia. **This is a rate of 69 per 10,000 residents and about 33% higher than the national average.** Of these, about 2,400 were sleeping rough; 62% were aged 34 years or younger; 32% were aged 12-18, and 9% were children under 12 years who were with either one or both parents. Eleven per cent of the State's homeless population were Indigenous.

The data also shows that in WA in 2006 **only 10.4% of people fitting the classification of homeless were in SAAP accommodation.**

The data quoted in the Ministers letter from the SAAP report *People turned away from government funded specialist homeless accommodation 2010-2001* is very superficial and misleading.

Data within the Report shows that on an average, on every day of the week during the two data collection periods, **up to 50 % of all people who seek help to address their homelessness are turned away.** The numbers of homeless people seeking help remains low as they know there is a chronic shortage of emergency accommodation and the chances of them being turned away is high so they give up trying and stay on couches, in squats or on the street.

The SAAP report also shows an increase in the numbers of people turned away from 2010 to 2011.

Recent media releases during Homeless Week from NFP organisations highlight an increasing demand for emergency and long term affordable housing. I have seen the recent press releases from Ruah after the first count of homeless people in central Perth giving the current situation of those living on the streets. There have also been statements on the situation in Geraldton.

The Housing Authority 2010-2011 Annual Report shows a failure to meet target for Effectiveness Indicators 1 and 2

1. Extent to which the Housing Authority is responsive to the housing needs of eligible Western Australians. Page 148
2. Waiting times for accommodation- applicants housed. Page 149

I have had personal experience of helping people in Mandurah and in the Northern suburbs. It is very, very difficult to get the accommodation for primary, secondary and tertiary homeless people. This is particularly if they are a couple and even worse, a couple with children.

Letters from the Minister for housing outline the measures being undertaken by the Government to provide more affordable housing in WA. Comments regarding the impact and adequacy of the initiatives.

Social planners state the emergency accommodation and social housing supply should be maintained somewhere between 6- 8%. In WA it can be argued it should be more than 8% as the two speed economy has resulted in more than 40% of households being at risk of housing stress.

The percentage of the total housing supply for low income people in Western Australia is said to be currently just over 3%. *Legislative Assembly Report; A Fading Dream, Nov 2011.*

The only way of increasing the total number of social housing unit is for the Governments (both State and Commonwealth) to invest directly in building them. The government commonly does this in partnership with other agencies, such as not-for-profit organisations.

The *Opening Doors to Affordable Housing 2010-2020* strategy of the Government is relying on housing low income people which will then free up social housing and so make more places to permanently house people who are currently in emergency housing. It will also help some people at risk of becoming homeless.

In August 2012 the new Housing Minister announced that 6,200 affordable homes had been created from January 2010 to June 30 2012. This figure appears to be impressive and about 25 % of the promised 20,000 new homes from 2010-2020. Of these 3,200 were new social housing units for the most disadvantaged.

The Housing Authority Annual Report 2010-2011 states there were a total of 563 beds for crisis accommodation.

The authority should be asked for; The nett increase in social housing stock January 2010-June 2012. The 3,200 new units does not give any indication of how many units are replacing housing which has been sold or demolished

The committee should obtain from the departments the actual number of beds for emergency accommodation there were in 2011-12 and the actual number there will be in the next 3 years after the projects mentioned in the letters have been completed. It is obvious that the letters are listing, replacement beds and renovations in with new beds.

The Minister is relying on the strategy of the increased supply of affordable housing units decreasing the need for social housing and so for emergency housing.

In my opinion the affordable housing strategy, utilising the private and NFP sectors is good. But the postulation that increasing affordable housing stock will reduce the need for more social housing and emergency accommodation stock is not going to happen.

The increase in emergency accommodation beds is not fast enough as the demands are steadily increasing.

The Minister has not insisted that all developments undertaken by the private sector on Government land have 10-15% low cost housing. Some areas such as Ellenbrook have had successful partnerships. But most areas have fallen short of this objective. See *Recommendation 23 and response to the Legislative Assembly Report; A Fading Dream* attached.

The Metropolitan Redevelopment Authority has the policy that 10- 15% of new developments contain low cost housing units. Some areas in Subiaco have not had any low cost units and the Fine China Site which is to have about 11% has not started yet.

It is accepted that about 8% of total housing stock should have construction costs supported fully or partially by government finance in order to be affordable for low income and social housing clients. In Western Australia this is most likely still 3%. *Legislative Assembly Report; A Fading Dream, Nov 2011.*

Are there specific services or resources needed in addition to the measures being undertaken?

Yes there needs to be more emergency accommodation beds apart from those capital works listed by the Minister for Housing. Yes there should be an increase in the budget for emergency accommodation capital works.

Regional areas in the Kimberley and Pilbara critical shortages at all levels are being addressed. Federal funding is assisting with crisis accommodation for aboriginal people and Royalties for regions money being used for a range of housing including affordable housing. But the regional areas in the southern

area have less facilities than the metropolitan areas. In Mandurah currently there are only 6 beds for emergency accommodation. There are no beds for emergency accommodation for men. There is a great shortage of beds in Geraldton.

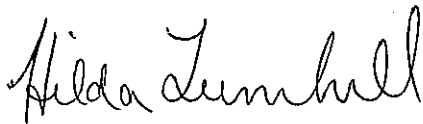
It is my opinion that more money is needed for emergency accommodation in all regional areas in the southern area of the state. There needs to be more emergency accommodation beds in regional areas, particularly in Mandurah and Geraldton. The Government needs to make the funding of extra emergency accommodation and the support staff required to service the beds a very high priority of the budget.

As far as the other two questions are concerned I do not have the expertise to comment in detail.

I could not find any evidence of an on line network available to the public. The department does have a data collecting system which supplies information to support agencies. I do not know how efficient this is.

The Census data is valuable but very out of date. The Census analysts should be asked to give a much higher priority to analysis of this area of the data. Certainly more surveys of the types of people seeking emergency accommodation is needed. See Government response to *Recommendation 23 and response to the Legislative Assembly Report; A Fading Dream* attached.

Yours Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Hilda Turnbull".

Hilda Turnbull, MB. BS.