

Shelter Tasmania

Response to the 10 year review of Tasmania Together

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Shelter Tasmania is pleased to present this response and contribute to the 10 year review of Tasmania Together. The key concerns for Shelter Tas are; affordable housing for low-to-moderate income Tasmanians and people at risk or experiencing homelessness. Both of these are crucial areas to be addressed by the Tasmania *Together* Board to be able to measure and progress towards achieving a fairer and more inclusive Tasmania.

Shelter Tasmania is the recognised non-government peak body for low income housing consumers, housing providers, and homelessness services and people experiencing homelessness across Tasmania. We have a strong focus on the affordability of housing for low-to-moderate income households, be that for private rental, social housing or home ownership. Shelter sees housing problems and homelessness solutions as the responsibility of all sectors of the community. This is reflected in our membership, which is diverse and provides a unique body of expertise in the housing and homelessness area.

Shelter's membership consists of a wide range of organisations across Tasmania, such as: tenants groups, community housing providers, homelessness and crisis accommodation services, local government, research organisations and a range of individuals and services interested in housing and homelessness issues. Shelter is an affiliated member of National Shelter and is part of a network of organisations representing consumer issues in relation to housing and human rights. The Council of Homeless Persons (Tasmania) is a subcommittee of Shelter. The Shelter Management Committee is made up of 12 elected members from across Tasmania. The Management Committee members represent a range of agencies and individuals with a broad knowledge and experience of issues facing low income housing consumers and housing provision.

To assist in progressing Tasmania *Together* goals and benchmarks as recommended in this response, Shelter is well placed to convene or participate in a working group to identify relevant housing and homelessness data and indicators.

Homelessness and Affordable Housing

Affordable Housing and Homelessness are key priorities for the Community and both the State and Federal Governments. In November 2010 Shelter submitted a response to the State Government budget consultation process. The Shelter submission linked key recommendations on Housing and Homelessness with the Tasmania Together goals ([download here Shelter Tas 2010](#)).

The Shelter Budget Submission noted the increased investment and attention by all Australian Governments through the Council of Australian Governments (COAG) reform agenda across the social housing, private rental, home ownership and homelessness system. The Tasmanian Government has noted that homelessness and social housing are major priorities. This includes a range of initiatives that have been announced - in particular:

- the Social Inclusion Strategy,
- social housing investment from the Economic Stimulus package,
- the National Affordable Housing Agreement (NAHA) and its three National Partnership Agreements, and
- the Tasmanian Homelessness Plan 2010-2013 (with its target to halve primary homelessness by 2010).

In answer to the three key questions posited by the Tasmanian Together Board for response from organisations are:

1. Do the goals and benchmarks adequately address current issues and concerns of your organisation?
2. Are there any priority issues not included in Tasmania Together that could be benchmarked?
3. Are there any emerging issues over the next 10 years that need to be addressed by the Progress Board?

Homelessness - Key Gap to be addressed

For Tasmania Together to address key issues of concerns of the Tasmanian Community, Homelessness is a clear gap and priority issue to be included. People experiencing homelessness are among the most vulnerable in our community. Thankfully, in the review process this gap can be addressed. In recent years, governments have placed a stronger emphasis on reducing and reforming homelessness service provision yet this has not been captured in Tasmania Together to date

Recent Context

Around 2,500 Tasmanians experience homelessness on any given night.¹ Most of these individuals are young; 54% are 24 or younger, giving Tasmania a much higher rate of youth homelessness than the national average.² Indigenous Tasmanians are over represented in all sections of the homeless population.³ ([see Shelter website](#)) Since 2001 there has been an increase in homelessness in Tasmania of over 3.5%.⁴ In the same five year period, the number of people sleeping rough and in improvised dwellings also increased markedly.⁵

The high demand for homelessness specific housing services, under the Supported Accommodation Assistance Program (**SAAP**), is placing significant strain on social services in Tasmania. On average, 22 people requiring new accommodation attempt to access SAAP accommodation services in Tasmania each day.⁶ More than 70% of these people are turned away,⁷ overwhelmingly because of a lack of available accommodation.⁸ In other words, more than two thirds of people experiencing homelessness who seek accommodation from relevant services are turned away every day, due to lack of beds. Tasmania also has the highest turn-away rate as a proportion of total demand for

¹ Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS), *Counting the Homeless 2006: Tasmania* (2009), 26.

² ABS 2006 data shows that nationally 43% of those homelessness are under 24 and 21% are aged 12-18; ABS, above n 1.

³ ABS, above n 1, 8.

⁴ Comparing ABS 2001 data (2415) with ABS 2006 data (2507) shows an increase of approximately 3.67% in the homeless population in Tasmania; ABS, above n 1.

⁵ ABS, above n 1, 31.

⁶ Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (**AIHW**), *Demand for SAAP Accommodation by homeless people 2007 – 2008*, May 2009, 38.

⁷ Ibid, 35.

⁸ 89.9% of valid unmet requests for SAAP accommodation in Tasmania are unmet because of a lack of available accommodation; AIHW, above n 6.

SAAP accommodation of any Australian State or Territory.⁹

In December 2008 the Rudd Government released a White Paper on Homelessness (“*The Road Home*”), with a vision to halve overall homelessness and offer supported accommodation to all rough sleepers who need it by 2020. Each State and Territory entered into a National Partnership Agreement on Homelessness. A key priority for the Tasmanian Government is to reduce the primary homelessness benchmark figure from 385 'rough sleepers' to 193 by the end of 2010. The ‘Tasmanian Homelessness Plan: Coming in from the Cold’ was launched by Cabinet Secretary Cassy O’Connor on 24th September 2010. This means there is a range of existing reporting on measuring homelessness that could be utilised by Tasmania *Together*.

How to Measure Homelessness?

The Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) Census (next ABS Census Count will be in August 2011) is the most reliable and comprehensive indicator of Homelessness rates and different cohorts across Australia. Baseline benchmarks could be linked with the appropriate census data as it’s released. In addition, the Tasmanian Homelessness Plan and the National Partnership Agreement on Homelessness all have reporting requirement that could be adopted and utilised by Tasmania Together. Shelter sat on the Counting the Homeless Working Group with Housing Tasmania, Social Inclusion Unit and ABS and there was considerable work done on how best to measure homelessness.

Shelter is currently sitting on the Housing and Homeless Sector Working Group, which is examining new data collection methods for Homelessness Services and a common waiting list for Public and Community Housing. This new data will be relevant to

Existing and potential benchmarks

The main issues for Shelter are Homeless and Affordable Housing; therefore we are supportive of the existing housing-related benchmarks and interested in their effectiveness. Most of these are under Goal 1 ‘A reasonable lifestyle and standard of living’. They include:

- 1.1.4 Housing Stress experienced by low income earners in Tasmania within the private rental market.
- 1.1.5 Tasmania Housing price to income ratio
- 1.1.6 Public housing waiting times.

As mentioned, there is a need to add homelessness benchmarks as well.

Public Housing Wait Times

This is an important measure and one of the few available as an indicator of housing need. This may also be useful for breaking down Category 1 and 2 into those who are homelessness, and especially primary homeless, including the length of time they stay on the waiting list. The waiting list is also subject to eligibility criteria changes so these should be accounted for as well. As the current waiting list is well over 3,000 many people get discouraged and do not apply, so its worth looking at additional indicators.

⁹ Ibid 37.

As part of Social Housing Reforms Housing Tasmania are currently working on a common waiting list for both public and community housing. The first stage of this is due to take effect from the 1st July 2011. This will impact on the current measurement of the public housing list.

Housing Stress

This is an important benchmark to track affordability of housing for low income tenants. Private rental properties housed 17.3% of all households in Tasmania¹⁰. While private rental housing has historically been considered largely a transitional tenure for policy purposes – a stepping stone towards home ownership – this has now changed, with many people living long term in the private rental market.

In addition, other measures to consider are:

- Vacancy Rates in the private rental market. This gives an indication of the level of private rental stock that is available and this can be linked with rental level. The REITA publishes these figures monthly. Shelter is happy to supply more information.
- **Turn away rates from Specialist Homelessness Services** (formerly Supported Accommodation Assistance Program). These rates give an indication of those people who cannot access emergency and transitional housing.

- **Standard of Rental Property.**

Shelter, as the peak body for housing, has consistently called for legislation to cover minimal standards of dwelling in the private rental market. With the repeal of the sub standard housing act there are currently no standards at all for properties rented in the private market. This is an emerging issue for Tasmania Together to take into account. The Residential Tenancy Act (1997) is currently under review. The Minister for Consumer Affairs, Nick McKim, announced at a recent 'Renting in Tasmania' conference that he supported reform in this area. This was strongly supported by all participants at the conference, who supported reform in this area. The impact of not having any standards for rental properties is that unhealthy premises are rented to those most vulnerable and in need of shelter, with a detrimental impact on their health and standard of living and lifestyle.

- **Energy Efficiency of Rental Property**

In line with the standard of the property energy efficiency needs to be included as this can have a large impact on low income tenants who pay the costs for heating, cooling and, increasingly, for water usage. Currently there are no standards for properties, including no standards around energy efficiency. This is a present and emerging issue for the Tas Together Board to address. There has been significant work in this area and Shelter would be happy to supply more information.

¹⁰ Housing Tasmanian 2003 Housing Tasmania, 2003, *Towards an affordable Housing Strategy*, Overview and Background Paper 1-7,

To Conclude, Shelter would like the opportunity to expand on this submission, to provide more detailed advice on issues related to affordable housing and homelessness and ways to include them in Tasmania Together, and ways to and measure them over the next 10 years.

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