

Housing PEOPLE



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Australasian **Housing** Institute

The stimulus package – community housing responses

As announced in recent speeches by Minister Tanya Plibersek, the federal government has initiated a massive swing towards the community housing sector as part of its Economic Stimulus Plan (ESP). Up to 75% of the new stock will eventually be owned and managed by community providers.

HousingPeople contacted two of those growth providers to get their initial responses to the ESP – and what it will mean for the future of the sector.

“We have put in a bid for a portion of the ESP dwellings,” says Matthew Woodward, CEO of Unity Housing, “our aim is for at least one hundred, but our hope is for hundreds.”

Unity is a major specialist provider of boarding house and low-cost rental accommodation in Adelaide which is moving into affordable housing in a big way.

“The role that community housing providers are being asked to fill is timely,” says Matthew. “I support the Commonwealth Government looking for selected community housing organisations who want to step into that role and have the capacity to step up to the mark.”

But he cautions that the ESP has to be kept in context:

“In South Australia it’s about 1500 new dwellings – it wasn’t that many years ago that the SA Housing Trust was making more starts than that per year. And the big question is can they make the numbers? In SA they’re doing all they can to achieve it.”

“One concern is making sure that the houses that are being developed match the need that the providers are servicing. If we’re going to hold the product as a long-term asset then we need to be sure it’s the right asset in the right place,” Mathew adds.

Jan Berriman recently became the Chief Operating Officer at Housing Choices Australia after her former organisation, Melbourne Affordable Housing, merged into its group structure.

“I expect exponential growth,” says Jan. “Community housing organisations have provided a listing of about 1700 units – everybody has been geared up and ready to go.”

Jan is confident that the Victorian community sector, with eight registered housing associations, can take the bulk of the state’s quota.

“We in the community sector have been requesting this for some time as we believe that the state housing authority model has been problematic for many years,” she says. “We are very positive that the federal government has moved to reform public and community housing and to ensure there is choice – real choice – for people.”

And the future?

“A decade from now I’d expect we’ll be offering a variety of products for a range of customers who require housing solutions – from homelessness and disability to affordable housing and shared equity products in integrated and inclusive environments.”



Matthew Woodward



A Unity Housing property



HCA CFO Jan Berriman



Spotlight on women

It may have been two decades in the making, but social housing professionals will this year finally get their chance to attend a conference specifically devoted to women’s housing issues. To be organised by Women’s Housing Limited (WHL) in Melbourne, it aims to inform policy development and planning to better anticipate and address women’s housing requirements in the short and long-term.

CEO of WHL Judy Line promises the meeting will strike a balance between issues facing women housing workers and those facing their female clients: “As in most professions with a female dominant workforce, and despite advances towards equality in the workplace over a number of decades, few women advance to senior positions in the housing sector,” she says.

Judy explains that the conference intends to build on the landmark AHURI report *Too Big To Ignore* published in September 2007. With the recent revelation from the AIHW that teenage girls are more likely than any other age group to access homeless shelters, it could hardly be more timely to re-focus on the causes of female disadvantage.

“With an ageing population and high rate of relationship breakdown, many women are sandwiched between the high cost of housing, which reduces affordability, and the low rental vacancy rate, increasing the cost of rent,” says Judy.

The experience of WHL shows women are extremely vulnerable to changing market conditions and increasing unemployment. Those most at risk include older women nearing retirement age with limited or little superannuation; women with young children who struggle to access appropriate childcare to enable them to participate in the labour market; and women who are forced to leave their home as a result of domestic violence.

Judy Line says that while this is not yet a grand national conference “it is the start of the road to achieving one.” “Everyone is welcome,” she adds “we want to bring all the key players together to have this discussion.”

The *Women in the Community Housing Sector: Building a Workforce for the 21st Century* report will also be released at the conference, along with other new research. The full program will be distributed soon.



Conference organiser Judy Line

Housing Futures for Women Conference

Date:	Tuesday 4 August 2009
Time:	9.00am – 4:30pm
Venue:	ZINC at Federation Square, Melbourne
Subsidised Cost:	Early bird rates: \$90 (registration before 23rd June) Full rates: \$115

For further information and booking please contact Holly on 9654 6077 or holly.mullaney@chfv.org.au

For the diary



Australasian **Housing** Institute

Event	Location	Date
Lunch with Owen Donald: Does Australia have enough housing?	MELBOURNE	13 May
Mental Health First Aid Training	LIVERPOOL	3 June

To register online visit the Events and Seminars home page at the AHI website



Mike Pelling

Today it may feel a fair while away, but before you know it – it will creep up on you and be on again! The 6th National Housing Conference, organised jointly by the Victorian Office of Housing and AHURI, will this year be held in Melbourne between the 24th and the 27th of November.

Planning is well underway and as the co-hosts point out, the event's theme – *Housing in a new era: building the connections* – is designed to provide a platform for exploring the essential connections between housing, people, place, community and nation.

The organisers have established a 14-member Program Advisory Group to assist with the theme, session topics and identifying speakers. The AHI's 'man on the group' is Michael Pelling, Principal of Business Development at the Swinburne Institute for Social Research.

"A program that is simultaneously stimulating, that canvasses a range of key policy, research and practice issues and integrates them where possible, and meets the expectations of broad housing interests, is a big call and very challenging," says Mike. "The dream is that it will happen!"

Mike says that the context in which the conference will be held is unique. The global financial crisis has prompted the \$6 billion housing stimulus package, and "despite the unfortunate pre-cursor, is close to the best news for housing in Australia since WW2." Linking these big picture items together will be part of the conference agenda.

"As the AHI rep, it is my hope that we can embed participation and 'practice' issues particularly in the working sessions," explains Mike. "To this end there have been limited discussions with groups

and individuals on key ideas for the program."

These ideas include suggestions for workshops on growth and governance and Indigenous housing. "With major changes occurring in the industry, one of the other big things we are highlighting for conference sessions is the workforce – its needs and its challenges."

There is however still some time for AHI members to put forward more key suggestions for the conference working sessions. "If you are excited by this prospect [!], please send them to me ASAP by email to: mpelling@swin.edu.au"

That's all for now from Mike Pelling.

For more information visit: <http://www.nationalhousingconference.org.au/melbourne2009>



AHI NOTICES Engage!

Engage! is a new mechanism for the AHI's members to become involved with hot housing issues, the current policy agenda and the key policy makers of our time. Your feedback will directly shape the institute's activities. It's an innovative way to take your views to the right people at the right time.

The topic for this edition is the federal government's strong turn towards the community housing sector.

Poll Question: *Should the bulk of the dwellings delivered through the Economic Stimulus Plan be managed by community housing organisations? Why / Why not? Send your replies to:* martin.blaszczyk@housinginstitute.org



The Master Builders and energy efficiency – an expert responds

The Master Builders Association (MBA) of Victoria is reported as condemning the recent Council of Australian Governments (COAG) decision to increase the energy efficiency of new housing as “environment symbolism” and “one of the most significant blows to housing affordability in the past decade”.

The MBA spokesperson, Radley de Silva, claimed that the new six star energy efficiency requirements will cost an extra \$10,000 for a new house, and proposed that government should instead improve the sustainability and energy efficiency of existing homes.

There is some truth in Mr de Silva’s comments – and some spin.

He’s right in claiming that the government should target the huge existing portfolio of housing if they are serious about making big reductions in emissions. It will cost, but there are quick returns in energy savings (governments please note). The UK’s scheme to fund energy efficiency upgrades by using energy savings should be copied here.

It’s a real pity so little thought has gone into working out cost-effective ways to retro-fit housing for energy efficiency.

But for new housing, the MBA is off the mark on affordability. It’s not hard to save \$10,000 in a new home design – that’s 5 square metres of floor area, about two per cent of a typical new house. And that \$10,000 figure is loaded up with the costs of double glazing.

It’s a pity that the six star energy efficiency requirement is based on building a better air-conditioned box. Double glazing and smaller openings are good for cold climates, but not right for many Australian environments. Politically, it is easy to regulate higher energy efficiency standards for new dwellings through the Building Code of Australia.

The hope is that legislating for new dwellings might alter market expectations of existing housing.

The debate highlights our values and priorities as a community. Is the MBA saying the planet’s and our children’s future is less important than the third bathroom? Is COAG going for the symbolic in its six star requirements? That’s worrying.

Mark Singer MAHI

Meet a new member...

To be entirely truthful, CEO of ACT Shelter Jeffrey Dalton is not quite yet a member of the AHI... but he is about to become one. He leaves no doubt however as to his political point of departure in the job:

“I see housing as a human right – the whole issue needs to be approached from a social justice perspective,” he says. “We have been ratcheting up shortfalls in supply for many years so we now have such a backlog that it’ll take us 20-30 years to catch up – and only if we get the political will to invest in social housing.”

A broad-based umbrella group such as Shelter needs people with wide horizons and a big picture approach – and Jeffrey certainly fits the bill. He points to the recently-released National Housing Supply Council report and concludes that it only tells half the story:

“The danger here is to presume that what we had in 1996 was adequate. The reality is that we are more than 300,000 properties short.”

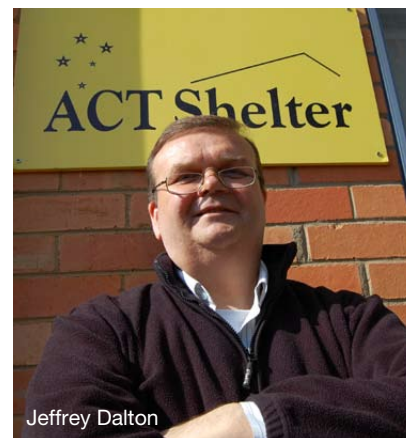
“You can’t look at social housing unless you look at the general area of affordable housing,” Jeffrey says.

“For many people in Canberra on low incomes paying a discounted market rent is not going to make the housing affordable because we deal with extremely high rentals.”

“We have evidence of people who are paying as much as 80% of their income in rent and living off food packages from charities. There are many aged pensioners in the private rental market who are paying well above 50% of their income. Our problem at a national level is that poor people can’t get decent housing.”

One of the key functions of Jeffrey Dalton’s job is to facilitate a monthly forum for all the social housing players across the ACT. “We try to make sure our members have the opportunity to contribute to the housing policy debate.”

He believes that the tensions between public and community housing provision are “unfortunate” and that the real issue is the best way of delivering safe, secure, affordable housing to people on low incomes.



In relation to the ESP money, Jeffrey thinks that the small number of small providers in the ACT means that “we may need to bring in one the interstate organisations.”

“One of the most important things in the development of community housing will be a regulatory framework to protect both the tenants and the public investment,” he explains.

A lawyer by trade, Jeffrey Dalton somewhat ironically spent a decade representing social housing tenant clients in disputes with their landlords – the very landlords who are now his stakeholders.