



Successful AHI Awards Event held in Melbourne

The masthead for HousingPeople this month is dedicated to the AHI Australasian Awards event held in Melbourne yesterday (27 October - caption next page).

Held just once every two years, the event was a celebration of the most recently completed cycle of AHI Awards for Professional Excellence in Housing, where the achievement across, and winners from, previous awards are lifted to a nation-wide level.

AHI President Lynden Pennicott described the event as an opportunity to look across the separate awards presented in each state or territory in order to celebrate a selection of award winners who have taken a place at the forefront of excellence as exemplars for the profession to take special pride in.

“First and foremost these Australasian-wide Awards reinforce the hard-won development of the housing profession in Australia and New Zealand. At the same time they showcase to our wider stakeholders and the wider public that we are a profession focused both on excellence and on continuing improvement”.

In his opening remarks Lynden observed that the AHI program of awards has “in many ways captured and reflected the unfolding story of the wider social housing sector in recent years”, adding that the awards could never happen without people who go about their jobs every day with enthusiasm, integrity and commitment.

“We often hear that individuals and teams in social housing are hesitant, or simply too busy, to put themselves forward into the limelight - which is why

the very decision to put forward a nomination for an AHI Award and every single nomination is so highly valued”.

Presenters of the AHI Australasian Awards included representatives from each of the event sponsors: MECU, Kinetic Information Systems and SDM Housing Software. In total nine presentations were made as follows:

Leading Practice - Healthy Housing programme (New Zealand); Colony 47 (Tasmania)

Leading Innovation - Robert Isaacs (Western Australia)

Leading Housing Solutions - Housing Choices Australia (Victoria), Frances Jamieson (New South Wales)

Tenant Led Initiative - Fred Morris (Far North Queensland Regional Tenants Advisory Group), Mountaha Najjar and Allan Priestley (Tenants - Affordable Housing Company, NSW)

Inspirational Colleague - Laurinne Campbell (NSW Aboriginal Housing Office)

Outstanding Achievement - Kathleen Gregory (Western Australia)

AHI looks forward to expanding on this abbreviated report and continuing to promote the knowledge to be gained from each and every award nomination. The next cycle of award presentations commences next week in South Australia - **read more on the next page.**



AHI - AGM Notice

The Australasian Housing Institute's Annual General Meeting will be held at 5pm on Wednesday 7th December 2011 at:

**Monash Conference Centre,
Level 11, (Collins St Boardroom)
30 Collins Street, Melbourne**



Allied to this notice a message was emailed to all members on Wednesday 19 October making a formal call for nominations to the Board of Directors.

The AHM Board of Directors consists of up to eleven (11) members, elected at an AGM. Two positions – the President and the Director - Indigenous Housing are elected by the entire membership. Another four Directors (New Zealand, Northern Territory, ACT and Tasmanian) are elected directly by the members in the jurisdiction. The remaining five (5) Directors (Queensland, NSW, Victoria, South Australia and Western Australia) are nominated by the local Branch Committee.

Nominations have been called for the positions of:

- President
- Director - Indigenous Housing
- Director - New Zealand
- Director - Tasmanian
- Director - Northern Territory

The position of Director – ACT is currently filled by David Mathews, whose term of office ends in 2012. There is a separate process for nominations by the Branch Committees. Information about the Branch Committee nominations will be sent to Branch Committees after 3rd November.

Any financial member may nominate for the President.

Members nominating for the Director – Indigenous Housing must also be involved in the Indigenous housing sector.

Members nominating for the Director – New Zealand must live and work in New Zealand, members nominating for the position of Director – Tasmania must live and work in Tasmania and members nominating for the position of Director – Northern Territory must live and work in the Northern Territory.

The Board shall be elected for a period of two years and each board member will be able to serve a maximum of 4 consecutive years. The role of the Board and the President are detailed in the Rules of the Australasian Housing Institute, available at www.housinginstitute.org

If you wish to be nominated to be on the Board of Directors you will need to complete a nomination form with an attached page of information about the skills and experience you will bring to the role

Nominations are due by 9th November 2011 and should be e-mailed or faxed to the Australasian Housing Institute Office. Email: admin@housinginstitute.org Fax +61 2 6494 7588

South Australian AHM Awards presentation on 3 November

There's still time left to register for the South Australian AHM Professional Excellence in Housing Awards presentation happening on Thursday 3rd November. The event is being held at the National Wine Centre of Australia, Adelaide, starting at 6.30pm.

Following the reshuffle of Ministers in South Australia under new Premier Jay Weatherill, AHM is very grateful that the new Minister for Social Housing Hon Ian Hunter has taken up the invitation accepted earlier by Hon Jennifer Rankine (who now holds a Community Safety portfolio), and will be in attendance.

Further information on the AHM Awards program can be obtained from Olena Sydorenko, AHM's Marketing and Online Projects Coordinator; olena.sydorenko@housinginstitute.org

Masthead/ front page photo:

From left to right the people in our masthead photo on the front page are: Scott Graham, Kinetic Information Systems; Fred Morris, Far North Queensland Regional Tenants Advisory Group; Bruce Rogers, SDM Housing Software; Claudia Butler, Colony 47; AHM President Lynden Pennicott; Nazha Saad (for Kathleen Gregory); Tony Gilmour (for Laurinne Campbell); Wendy Harris (for Robert Isaacs); Tracey Moore, Healthy Housing/ Housing New Zealand; John Nicolades; Frances Jamieson; Simone Douglas, MECU; and Michael Lennon, Housing Choices Australia.

Photo credit: Frank Artuso



Australasian Housing Institute

Professional Development Events Program

November - December 2011

Mental Health First Aid

A two-day workshop designed to improve the mental health literacy of the community.

The workshop engages participants in a variety of small and large group case scenarios and activities that allow you to practise and reinforce the learning gained in the information and content lessons. You will be given ongoing feedback during the practical group sessions to ensure the techniques you practise will be effective in your working environment.

Who should attend? This course will be of great benefit to housing professionals and community service providers who work directly with clients.

Melbourne, 7 November Sydney, 1 December

Working with Clients who have Drug and/or Alcohol Dependency

A one-day workshop for client services staff. At times, housing and support staff work with clients who are experiencing substance abuse dependency. This training is provided to assist housing workers who work with people who may be experiencing difficulties in living that may be associated with alcohol or substance abuse issues (abuse, misuse and dependency).

Who should attend? This workshop is aimed at social housing professionals whose work involves direct contact with clients.

Newcastle, 3 November

Stepping Up - A Roadmap for New Supervisors

The goal of this one-day workshop is to provide participants with an accurate, real-life picture of what it means to be a supervisor, the expectations for the position, the skills and knowledge required as a supervisor, and the path to effectively supervise others.

Who should attend? Whether you have recently become a supervisor, will soon be promoted to the position, or are seriously considering becoming a supervisor, Stepping Up is the key to realising your full potential.

Melbourne, 14 November Sydney, 15 November

Measuring Maintenance: Tools and Processes to Manage Risk. Practitioners Networking Forum

The joint AHI & Hi-Tech Inspect Forum aims to examine current technological means to support asset management decision making particularly around inspection of properties and developing programs of work. The forum will provide an opportunity for practitioners to discuss processes for identifying and prioritising repair work in the context of broader asset planning and limited budgets.

Who should attend? The forum will be of use to current asset managers from across the social housing sector.

Sydney, 16 November

People and Places: A Master Class Series for housing professionals involved in place making, community renewal and urban regeneration

A small working group of practitioners formed the view that housing people would be interested in sharing ideas about and working together on five major themes: the governance and management of community renewal projects; the built form; social and economic participation; community engagement; and funding and finance.

Who should attend? The People and Places Master Class Series is designed to support housing professionals involved in place making, community renewal and urban regeneration.

Melbourne, 7-8 December

Register on-line at <http://www.housinginstitute.org/events/register/register.php>

If you have any inquiries regarding workshops content, prices or booking, please, do not hesitate to contact us directly

admin@housinginstitute.org

P +61 2 64947566 F +61 2 64947588

www.housinginstitute.org



Moving times for HousingWorks

The latest edition of HousingWorks - Volume 9, Number 3/4 - is being distributed to AHI members this week, and a download copy is available now in the Members Only area of the AHI website at www.housinginstitute.org

The excellent cover photo was taken by New Zealand photographer Neil Price, and shows a tenant of social housing provided by Wellington City Council being assisted with a temporary move while the apartment he has lived in for 31 years is upgraded.

Feature articles in this October edition, the last for 2011, begin with an exploration of the big question being put to AHURI's "Beyond the current NAHA" conference: What next for national housing policy?

This important conference concludes today in Melbourne and is bound to spur on much further discussion and productive debate. (See also the attached HousingWorks extract about the NAHA).

In other features we touch down in South Australia for a whistlestop summary of housing activity there as well as a precis of the Housing Strategy Green Paper currently being consulted on. In another article, this one focused on the collegial fortitude, resilience and perseverance needed to provide services in earthquake torn Christchurch, AHI members Kevin Bennett, Marsha Davies and Annette Sutherland exemplify those very qualities.

HousingWorks is, as ever, heavily reliant on the willing cooperation of AHI member networks for contributions to make it a meaningful publication.

After a slight hiatus as we moved between editors, planning is well underway for the schedule for this flagship quarterly in 2012. So... if you have a burning idea about a housing topic that struggles to gain attention, or are sitting on a brief case study about leading practice in your housing organisation please let our new editor know by email to stephen.olsen@housinginstitute.org.nz **The next editorial deadline is 31 January so the time for ideas and action is now!**

An allied development ...

In line with AHI's business strategy for delivering great products and building greater connection through our networks, publications and online media, AHI members will be interested to know that a companion web-presence has been created for HousingWorks which we



are calling the HousingWorks "news-site".

This online dimension to HousingWorks is intended to provide a staging platform for informing our print edition as well as complementing AHI's member bulletin HousingPeople. We are initially developing this resource on a trial basis. **Key aspects** of the first stage of content development include:

- **Regular blogposts** featuring relevant social housing news, events and topical material drawn from a wide variety of sources
- An ability to run **interactive 'Polls'** on a range of topics
- A growing and comprehensive index to **past topics** covered in the print edition of HousingWorks
- A growing and comprehensive index of **past and current contributors** to the print edition of HousingWorks
- A 'Library' section of selected HousingWorks articles available for free download
- A 'Gallery' section for a rotating selection of embedded video clips and photos

The current access point is **via the Publications tab on the AHI website under HousingWorks** or direct to ahi-housingworks.org



THE BIG QUESTIONS

What next for national housing policy?

This article appears in the latest edition of AHI's publication **HousingWorks**

An introduction

The review of the current National Affordable Housing Agreement (NAHA), due to be concluded by June 2012, looms large at the forefront of housing policy and practice debate in Australia.

HousingWorks goes to press just before a government-sponsored AHURI conference "Beyond the current NAHA" is held in Melbourne on 27-28 October 2011, which focuses on the key question: "What next for national housing policy?"

This event will bring together a diversity of perspectives from Ministers, Indigenous leaders, senior public servants, innovators from the not-for-profit sector and academic commentators to debate, discuss and engage on the reform process associated with developing a new NAHA.

In August this year the Council of Australian Governments (COAG) considered the Performance Report for NAHA for 2009-2010, as publicly released on 8 June 2011. At the time of that report's release Senator Marise Payne, Liberal Party Shadow Minister for Housing, noted that a comprehensive report of progress under the National Partnerships associated with the NAHA (Social Housing; Homelessness; Remote Indigenous Housing) was limited by a lack of available and comparable performance information.

At the "Beyond the current NAHA" event a critique of the NAHA and its performance is being coupled with a strong emphasis on critical success factors. The objectives for its four sessions are to:

- provide a political perspective on the successes and challenges in national housing policy
- identify the factors that are critical to the successful delivery of affordable housing under the NAHA
- identify the limitations of the current NAHA and pinpoint where policy goals and mechanisms would have improved outcomes

- consider how the factors critical to success can be captured in a new national housing policy framework to deliver greater gains in the future.

Before the sessions begin Professor David Hayward of RMIT University will deliver a presentation focused on providing attendees with an understanding of the political-economic context for the NAHA's predecessor, the Commonwealth-State Housing Agreement (CSHA - effective from 1 July 2003 to 31 December 2008) and the NAHA itself. He will then address what the key features of Australian political-economic partnership will be over the next five years and what this means for national housing policy.

Session panellists will then be leading discussion across a fascinating array of questions:

- What have the key successes of the NAHA been, and why were these feasible politically?
- Where is housing on the electoral radar?
- Which housing reforms will engage electoral support and which not?
- Does geographic context affect critical success factors?
- Are the political and economic conditions that led to recent successes replicable in the future?

As conference rapporteur Dr Jeff Harmer, former Secretary of the Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs (FaHCSIA) and now chair of the recently appointed Social Housing Advisory Committee (see page 5 of this edition of **HousingWorks**), has the challenge then of drawing threads of conversations generated by the conference into some closing remarks.

At the Australasian Housing Institute (AHI) we have actively sought member's views on the NAHA's "missing ingredients" through a recently activated discussion group on the popular social media platform LinkedIn.

Here's a sample of some of the comments made in the discussion group on the missing ingredients of the NAHA:

- The absence of comprehensive or analytical policy thinking about the whole system inhibits specific government programmes from having the necessary impact. Grasping the real economics of the existing public housing system and its relationship to cyclical disadvantage is necessary at the top political and policy advice level.
- One of the useful points of reference for how different jurisdictions are tackling Affordable Housing strategies is the work of Western Australia's Department of Housing. It would be interesting to get views about the Strategic Direction being taken in WA.
- Maybe it should be a two-staged process: 1. What are the models out there? 2. What is the commitment to each model, by the proponents, and by involved stakeholders / partners?
- Innovation in these difficult times is imperative and Government should have the courage to tackle this supply issue. The same old NAHA cannot continue...

Being able to use online forums in this way is an increasingly valuable way to access a wide cross-section of views across the housing profession, and is another way that the AHI is able to connect to, communicate with and support housing professionals

In this edition of **HousingWorks** we have the privilege of featuring some longer commentary and opinion pieces provided specifically for **HousingWorks** by AHI members and supporters: Vivienne Milligan, Steve Staikos, Jon Eastgate, Lucy Burgmann and Toni Vine Bromley.

The shape and structure of future national housing policy is a fundamentally important topic that the AHI will be monitoring closely, and that we will return to again in future editions of **HousingWorks**.

Truly 'moving forward' in housing policy



Vivienne Milligan
City Futures
Research Centre
University of New
South Wales

Housing must surely rank among the most fundamental cross-cutting policy issues confronting Australian governments, affecting a wide spectrum of matters that range from individual housing needs through social equity, urban, health and environmental outcomes to national economic performance and growth.

The importance of housing to Australia's economy and society can be summed up by three indicators: housing represents 13 per cent of all annual domestic consumption expenditure plus 6 per cent of annual national investment expenditure, and it accounts for 54 per cent of domestic wealth. Yet Australia continues to experience uncertainty and volatility in housing policy-making, and national and state level responsibilities for housing policy are fragmented across disparate and disconnected portfolios.

A long-awaited elevation of housing policy to the national stage got off to a flying start in late 2007 with energetic Ministerial leadership and the largest boost to Commonwealth government investment in the field in two decades.

Operating from January 2009, the new National Affordable Housing Agreement (NAHA) promised much as a comprehensive and integrated framework for driving housing policy reform on a long term basis. Crucially, it obligated participating governments to achieve progress against specific targets for improved housing outcomes, and to do so in a transparent and accountable way.

Key programmes to be taken forward under the NAHA (and related initiatives) included the social housing stimulus program, additional affordable rental housing supply, homelessness services reform and remote Indigenous housing investment. Despite a considerable slow down since the political turmoil that has subdued and distracted Canberra over the past 18 months, many of these initial new directions have continued to advance steadily, albeit generally more slowly than originally envisaged.

But progress on the wider agenda that housing policy must address remains elusive and there are major policy gaps to be tackled. In a nutshell, the biggest and most important of these include:

- Ensuring the long term social and financial sustainability of the social housing system. This hinges on having a needs-driven investment and growth plan for social housing, recognising the critical need for ongoing public funding, and incorporating multi-provider, mixed-income and mixed-tenure delivery arrangements;
- Building political consensus for, and incrementally tackling, those tax reforms that will make the housing system fairer for future generations – drawing on the important ground work laid down in the Henry review of taxes and transfers; and
- Strategic integration of housing, planning and infrastructure policies in our major cities and growth regions, using strategies geared to tackling the interplay of affordability, environmental, social equity and labour market challenges in a context of significant demographic change.

There can be no argument that a broad conception of strategic housing policy is required to manage the complex and highly dynamic economic, social and environmental impacts of housing. Therefore, to consolidate and extend

progress under the NAHA so far, the next stage of policy development must not only engage with policy gaps, but also set out a coherent vision and strategic plan for achieving a more equitable and sustainable housing system.

No less important than the vision will be its effective implementation.

After a long period of policy neglect, government policy capacity in this field has evidently become a major constraint. Aligning housing policy and welfare service administration has not served Australia well. The time has more than come to have permanent and well-equipped housing and urban/regional departments operating at national and state levels.

There would also be considerable benefit in fostering better engagement by local government, alongside of building its capacity in this area – especially if we are to progress the increasingly lauded benefit of developing responsive local housing agendas. The idea for this direction was included in the framing of the first NAHA but not acted upon.

The impending review of the NAHA provides a crucial opportunity to reinvigorate housing policy endeavours and to truly progress the conception of this intergovernmental agreement as a progressive, comprehensive, integrated and accountable plan for the housing sector.

Sources and further reading

Milligan, V. and Pinnegar, S. 2010, 'The comeback of national housing policy in Australia: first reflections', *International Journal of Housing Policy*, 10(3):325-344

Milligan, V. and Tiernan, A. forthcoming 2011, 'No home for housing: The Situation of the Commonwealth's Housing Policy Advisory Function', *Australian Journal of Public Administration*.

Putting the case for Community Housing



Steve Staikos
Policy and Public
Affairs Officer,
Community Housing
Federation of Victoria

No one believes that the current levels of Community and Public Housing are adequate to meet the needs of Australians experiencing housing stress. So the upcoming renegotiation of the National Affordable Housing Agreement (NAHA) provides us with a real opportunity to change the way more of this Affordable Housing is delivered in this country.

Any time money goes from Canberra to the states, there are always strings attached.

In the lead up to the last NAHA that came into effect in early 2009, Australia had a change of Government. Before the 2007 election, cost of living pressures on working families was a key theme of the election campaign and Labor's messages.

Middle Australia was being appealed to, their mortgage repayments were high, fuel was more expensive, their discretionary spending was limited and they weren't happy about it.

More than ever before, the Howard Government was looking to change policy, and provide a point of difference - something new - for an historic fifth term in office. Social Housing was a big sticking point between the Labor dominated States and the Coalition Federal Government, and provided space for a new approach.

In July 2007 the then Community Services Minister, Mal Brough, said the Commonwealth was spending nearly a billion dollars a year on a system that was delivering fewer houses. Previous policy failed to increase the numbers of Community and Public Housing across the country, and in some states the amount of stock actually decreased.

He went on to say in that same interview on ABC's PM program that, "...it really is

nonsensical to continue to [put] money into a system which is producing less houses for Australian families that need them the most."

This was a significant statement for the Commonwealth, and flagged their reluctance to continue to pour good money after bad into the ongoing maintenance and administration of the State Public Housing portfolios. What Mal Brough was looking for, was a way to ensure Federal dollars were being used to grow the numbers of Public and Community Housing, and for the States to accept responsibility of maintaining and administering their own portfolios.

Of course, with the Labor win in 2007, and Mal Brough no longer holding that position, these ideas in the context of a new NAHA took a back seat. In March 2009, three months after the Rudd Government along with all the States signed up to the most recent 'business as usual' NAHA, the then Minister for Housing, Tanya Plibersek, outlined her vision for what they started calling social housing.

Labor criticised the Howard Government for cutting Federal support to Public and Community Housing, with the sector making up 5.8% of overall housing numbers in 1996, but falling to 4% by 2008. By this stage, the realities of the Global Financial Crisis had hit, and the Rudd Government needed to stimulate the economy, save jobs and keep Australia out of recession. So \$6.4 billion - money of a never before seen magnitude - was found to build new social housing across the country.

And the best news was, in Ms Plibersek's own words, "the Government's reform agenda is to facilitate the growth of a number of sophisticated not-for-profit housing organisations that will operate alongside existing state-run authorities." It was boom time for Community Housing providers. This approach ensures capital was used to provide more housing, and housing that does not pose an ongoing administrative and maintenance financial burden on governments.

Community Housing Organisations were identified as sound businesses that are highly regulated by state authorities.

These not-for-profit organisations have a sole purpose to provide quality, affordable rental homes for those on fixed and modest incomes - many for whom the private market does not provide any options. Some of the people who qualify for housing are known as key workers, those people on low incomes, unable to afford mortgages or rental payments in homes well located to the education, health, jobs and services they need.

Because of the way Community Housing Organisations run their businesses, with a focus on efficiency, scale, cooperation and a sustainable mix of tenants, these financial models mean that once the buildings are in place, this form of housing is less reliant on ongoing government subsidies, and can make ends meet with an income stream based on a tenant's ability to pay in addition to Commonwealth Rental Assistance.

Whilst Ms Plibersek committed that the vast majority of growth would occur via the Community Housing sector, or be transferred to the sector eventually, the (former) Victorian State Government had other ideas.

First they would impose the toughest and most comprehensive regulatory framework in the country, and then decided that they'd fund only 75% of any project with the Commonwealth money, the rest must be borrowed from lenders. This arrangement did not occur in any other State or Territory.

The Victorian State Government also decided that half of the Economic Stimulus (approx. \$600 million) would be used for them to build more much-needed Public Housing. The State Government promised to make it up by transferring \$475 million worth of stock over to the Community Housing sector, but this was a Labor commitment, and, with the change of government, that transfer was deferred at the last State Budget and is currently under review.

Community Housing Organisations have delivered growth in social housing across the country, and taken on staff devoted to delivering the new developments, yet all that appears to be coming to an end. These organisations are faced with little new prospects for growth,

and no real government money, State or Commonwealth, as times are getting tougher. Ironically, this is happening at a time when so many people are so obviously in need of housing support.

While the Community Housing Federation of Victoria is looking for new and interesting ways to fund future growth, it cannot be denied that governments need to respond to the needs of people in housing stress.

And that's where the new NAHA comes in. It really must focus on growing the numbers of Community Housing dwellings. A significant portion of the money set aside in the NAHA for new dwellings should be dedicated to Community Housing providers to tender for.

In Victoria, the growth providers, or the Housing Associations are able to leverage an additional 25% into the projects, effectively building more housing at less of a cost to the taxpayer. This is housing that has no ongoing financial burden on the state-run housing authorities and it is housing that provides a more sustainable mix of tenancies for giving people at risk the best opportunity to get ahead in life.

Improving the NAHA – Aspirations and Tools



Jon Eastgate
99 Consulting

Housing policy in Australia tends to default to funding welfare programs for the most

disadvantaged (or, like the first home owners grants, for the middle class) and leaving the rest to the market. Yet I believe the conditions in which that market operates are built to fail low and moderate income households.

The National Affordable Housing Agreement represents a first step away from this default position. It has a great set of goals which provide a framework for addressing the Australian housing system as a whole. It aims to provide sustainable housing for people who are

homeless, provide quality affordable housing in the rental and purchase markets, make housing markets more efficient and responsive, and address housing amenity and overcrowding for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. Achieving these aims would be a once-in-a-generation policy triumph.

Governments and the homelessness service sector are making good progress on reform of homelessness services. We are in the midst of a major transformation of social housing and have just given it a substantial funding injection. We are building and renovating houses in remote Aboriginal communities. These things are good and we should keep finding ways to do them better.

However, we have still not identified what to do about key aspects of the broader housing system and the tools in use are still not far from the default position.

A substantial proportion of Australian households, mostly on low to moderate incomes, will spend the bulk of their adult lives renting in the private market. Yet the market is geared almost exclusively towards short-term tenure, driven by small-scale investors taking advantage of negative gearing to reduce their tax.

Early efforts to establish projects under NRAS show that even with a generous subsidy, it is difficult to make rental housing stack up as an investment for institutional investors. Re-orienting this market will take major taxation changes and the establishment of new investment vehicles, as well as a revamp and re-examination of NRAS.

Similarly, the purchase price of housing has been rising faster than the average household income for decades, making housing progressively less affordable for ordinary working households.

While prices have recently levelled off and some gains have been made in affordability the COAG Reform Council attributes this to the effects of the Global Financial Crisis and interest rate movements, not any deliberate government strategy.

Keeping the lid on prices in the long-term will be a delicate balancing act, requiring not only the manipulation of interest rates, but better attention to the supply

side of the market through changes to the planning and land supply system, and some modest changes to tax regimes to make residential property less of a tax haven.

These are complex issues to address because it is not easy to predict how private investors will respond to Government policy signals. These issues are also outside the traditional realm of housing ministers and are tied up with broader economic policy questions. It is much easier to focus just on the business at hand: the building of houses and the provision of services. Yet if we don't make the attempt to succeed more broadly than that, we will effectively be admitting that the goals of the NAHA are unattainable.

What's missing in the NAHA?



Lucy Burgmann
Manager of
Government &
Community Relations,
Affordable Housing
Solutions

The development of the National Affordable Housing Agreement brought with it high hopes for a broader and more powerful document than the old Commonwealth State Housing Agreement. While the NAHA is a vital tool for bringing all governments together to address Australia's housing affordability crisis, nevertheless with some additional ingredients a "new NAHA" can be even more effective.

The NAHA's aspirational objective declares that all Australians should have access to affordable, safe, sustainable housing that contributes to social and economic participation. Taking this seriously means treating housing as a central public policy concern, which must be addressed in a coherent, determined fashion.

Unfortunately, housing has a history of fragmented policy and delivery, characterised by many different programs operating under many different rules and requirements. At present, there

are multiple programs under the NAHA, and key housing initiatives such as the National Rental Affordability Scheme and Commonwealth Rent Assistance remain outside the agreement. Equally unfortunate is housing's history of underfunding: the significant growth delivered under the existing NAHA came via funding packages such as the Social Housing Growth Fund and Nation Building, which have now expired.

To begin to solve our housing affordability crisis, a first challenge for the new NAHA is to establish a structure for securing significant private finance, such as a special purpose affordable housing bond which is currently the subject of AHURI research. This could come with a modest tax incentive or government guarantee, as a cost-effective way of attracting institutional and retail investors into the supply of social and affordable housing.

Such a bond would generate a pool of low-cost private finance, governed by the NAHA. Proper regulation would reduce the risk to investors, thereby also reducing the cost, as well as ensuring that the investment achieves not only housing affordability, but other public policy outcomes such as diverse communities, access to transport and jobs, and environmentally sustainable design.

This bond is not to replace, but to complement and extend the impact of, existing public funding. A second challenge for the new NAHA, then, is to integrate rising levels of private finance with significant public investment: to maximise the value of every public dollar, whether capital or recurrent.

Integration doesn't mean "one size fits all": the NAHA should encompass a range of different types and levels of housing assistance, depending on need and amenity, which support social and affordable rental housing as well as reaching into the private rental market and affordable home ownership. The NAHA needs to be the place where all these various strands of public subsidy are linked up so that they work more effectively together.

It is only by making use of every possible avenue for expanding the scale of our response that the NAHA can hope to make a difference to housing affordability.

Future housing policy should support innovation



Toni Vine Bromley
Executive Officer, NT Shelter

The first and current National Affordable Housing Agreement was a leap forward

from the Commonwealth State/Territories Housing Agreement it replaced. By including local governments and setting out specific reform agendas through its associated National Partnership Agreements (NPAs) it became a truly national agreement. However, in many ways this NAHA and associated NPAs have failed to live up to sector hopes.

By retaining a purely per-capita funding formula the NAHA perpetuates a 'winners and losers' situation amongst states. States with larger population bases and relatively smaller percentages of social housing stock are able to both maintain and grow their stock, whereas some states and territories with smaller populations and relatively higher percentages of stock may need to sell off stock, especially where there are significant debts. In addition, inadequate indexation meant that core funding for housing assistance fell in real terms.

While there is general support for the NAHA and associated NPAs as an appropriate approach to funding and shaping housing assistance it is noted that most people on low incomes rely on the private rental market for accommodation, and Commonwealth Rent Assistance being outside the scope of NAHA means housing assistance strategy is fragmented.

National Shelter supports the concept of twin streams of funding:

- **Operational funding** to manage, maintain and replace existing stock: to be calculated on a per dwelling basis; and

- **Growth funding** to encourage a net gain in stock and potentially other forms of housing assistance: to be calculated on a per capita basis.

Support for operational funding on a per dwelling basis, is highly dependent on linking the concept to growth funding calculated on a per capita basis as this is seen as fairer basis for calculating funding regardless of population share and historic stock numbers.

There is also a clear recognition that the traditional grants funding approach to public and small scale community housing is unsustainable and that the next NAHA needs to create a broader based housing assistance system to achieve financial and social sustainability.

In order to grow the whole system to house more people in the greatest need, providers need to move beyond total reliance on grant funding.

Essential to creating opportunities for growth is strategic transfer of title to community housing providers who have greater scope to leverage than state agencies.

As community housing providers become more established, leaders are beginning to use innovative ways beyond pure reliance on grant funding to grow their stock numbers. Stand out providers in most jurisdictions have been able to combine Stimulus, NRAS and private finance to create developments which mix deeper subsidy social housing, NRAS, and sale-to-market stock which in the longer run can achieve both growth in stock numbers for housing assistance and more socially sustainable neighbourhoods. Future housing policy should therefore maintain and expand program flexibility to support such innovation.

There are also significant connections between the NAHA and related agendas, including planning and taxation. The NAHA and its NPAs are not the instruments through which to address these agendas. Rather, the housing elements of these related policy areas need to be addressed in parallel.