

STANDING COMMITTEE ON HEALTH, COMMUNITY
AND SOCIAL SERVICES

The Provision of Social Housing in the ACT

AUGUST 2012

Report 8

Committee membership

Mr Steve Dospot MLA (Chair)

Ms Amanda Bresnan MLA (Deputy Chair)

Ms Mary Porter AM MLA (Deputy Chair 16 December 2008 – 22 June 2011)

Dr Chris Bourke MLA (23 June to 6 December 2011)

Mr John Hargreaves MLA (Appointed 6 December 2011)

Please note that Mr Hargreaves did not participate in the deliberation meetings relating to this Report.

Mr Hargreaves wished to avoid the perception of a conflict of interest due to his close involvement with social housing in the ACT. As a previous Minister for the portfolio he contributed to a number of programs discussed in this Report.

Secretariat

Ms Grace Concannon	Secretary (until 6 January 2012)
Mr Trevor Rowe	Secretary (February – April 2012)
Ms Kate Harkins	Secretary (May – August 2012)
Ms Lydia Chung	Administrative Assistant

Contact information

Telephone	02 6205 0129
Facsimile	02 6205 0432
Post	GPO Box 1020, CANBERRA ACT 2601
Email	committees@parliament.act.gov.au
Website	www.parliament.act.gov.au

Resolution of appointment

On 9 December 2008, the Legislative Assembly for the ACT resolved to establish the **Standing Committee on Health, Community and Social Services** to:

Examine matters related to hospitals, community, public and mental health, health promotion and disease prevention, disability matters, drug and substance misuse, targeted health programs and community services, including services for older persons and women, families, housing, poverty, and multicultural and indigenous affairs.¹

¹ Legislative Assembly for the ACT, *Minutes of Proceedings No 2*, 9 December 2008, pp 12–13.

Terms of reference

To inquire into and report on the provision of social housing through ACT Housing, with particular reference to:

1. The findings of the 2011 ACT Ombudsman's Report in relation to the *ACT Housing priority housing waiting list, Assessment of an Application for Priority Housing*, June 2011;
2. The demand for social housing including an examination of the current waiting lists and eligibility criteria for priority and high needs housing;
3. The management of waiting lists, innovative strategies to reduce waiting lists and the development of the Social Housing Register (the new centralised waiting list for social housing in the ACT);
4. The current range, availability and suitability of social housing stock, including new models of social housing (such as the intentional village model designed for people with a disability and sustainable housing models) and any financial implications;
5. The management and maintenance of social housing stock including the development of an asset management plan;
6. The needs of social housing managers and all social housing tenants, including but not limited to:
 - current tenants;
 - prospective tenants including those on waiting lists; and
 - people socially and geographically affected by social housing allocation.
7. Any other related matter.

STANDING COMMITTEE ON HEALTH, COMMUNITY AND SOCIAL
SERVICES

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Committee membership	i
Resolution of appointment.....	ii
Terms of reference	iii
RECOMMENDATIONS	VII
ABBREVIATIONS	XII
FOREWORD	XIII
1 INTRODUCTION	1
Conduct of Inquiry	1
Social housing.....	1
The ACT Ombudsman's report.....	3
2 ACT OMBUDSMAN REPORT AND ACT GOVERNMENT RESPONSE.....	5
Gateway Quality Improvement Project.....	8
3 SOCIAL HOUSING IN THE ACT.....	9
Accessing social housing in the ACT	9
Criteria for social housing.....	12
Waiting List.....	16
Cost of accessing social housing	17
Debt Management	20
Process for appeals.....	20
Complaints	22
Communication.....	24
4 RANGE OF ACT SOCIAL HOUSING STOCK	25
5 MANAGING ACT SOCIAL HOUSING STOCK.....	39
Maintenance of ACT social housing stock.....	41
Energy Efficiency.....	43
6 CONCLUSION	45
APPENDIX A: SUBMISSIONS	47
APPENDIX B: PUBLIC HEARINGS	49

STANDING COMMITTEE ON HEALTH, COMMUNITY AND SOCIAL
SERVICES

RECOMMENDATIONS

RECOMMENDATION 1

2.15 The Committee recommends that Housing ACT undertake a review of the Gateway Quality Improvement Project. This review should include reference to all areas of concern identified by the ACT Ombudsman's Report and be widely disseminated.

RECOMMENDATION 2

3.11 The Committee recommends that Housing ACT undertake an audit of its website and ensure that:

- a. All documents are dated.
- b. All documents are presented by when they are most commonly required according to the social housing cycle, instead of the current alphabet approach. For example, information about accepting a property should follow information about the application process.
- c. All links to legislation on the website and within documents provided are current.
- d. Information on the waiting time for different models of community housing is provided.

RECOMMENDATION 3

3.12 The Committee recommends that Housing ACT only require essential eligibility documentation at initial application interviews. Any other documentation, such as evidence of community based support services, should only be required when a suitable property is identified.

RECOMMENDATION 4

3.13 The Committee recommends that Housing ACT amend the current application form to include more information on the different types of social housing available, and the different management and rent arrangements for each particular type of housing.

RECOMMENDATION 5

3.22 The Committee recommends that all applications determined as eligible for priority housing be provided to the Multi-Disciplinary Panel, and that a comparative needs test be applied only after the Multi-Disciplinary Panel assess the application as eligible.

RECOMMENDATION 6

3.37 The Committee recommends that the rental rebate scheme be reassessed on a 12 monthly basis, instead of the current six months.

RECOMMENDATION 7

3.47 The Committee recommends that Housing ACT undertake urgent stakeholder discussions in relation to the policy on repaying debts, and publish a plain English document for tenants explaining the policy and the correct method for calculating the minimum repayment amount.

RECOMMENDATION 8

3.54 The Committee recommends that Housing ACT conduct an audit of its policy and procedures for administrative decision appeals. Policies should include guidance on what elements are to be considered, when an applicant will be informed of the decision, and ensure applicants are provided with reasons for the decision.

RECOMMENDATION 9

3.55 The Committee recommends that Housing ACT release a fact sheet detailing its appeal process. This should be widely disseminated.

RECOMMENDATION 10

3.61 The Committee recommends that Housing ACT re-examine their data collection system for complaints, and provide information regarding the number of resolved matters in their Annual Report. Data surrounding outcomes from unresolved matters should also be included.

RECOMMENDATION 11

3.66 The Committee strongly recommends that Housing ACT devise a joint communication strategy with all relevant Government agencies, including the Health Directorate and Disability ACT, and community organisations that regularly engage with tenants. This strategy should be based on the submissions received by the Committee during this Inquiry and be widely disseminated.

RECOMMENDATION 12

4.13 The Committee recommends that Housing ACT engage local community organisations involved with the design and ongoing management of accommodation facilities for people with disabilities in their upcoming research process examining alternative models of supported housing.

RECOMMENDATION 13

4.21 The Committee recommends that Housing ACT only seek evidence of appropriate individual support needs when a suitable property becomes available. A person with a disability should have 30 days to provide evidence of appropriate support from the date of offer, not at the time of applying for social housing.

RECOMMENDATION 14

4.22 The Committee recommends that Housing ACT maintain a register of properties that are suitable for people with disabilities, ranked to show what accessible components are available within that property.

RECOMMENDATION 15

4.23 The Committee recommends that Housing ACT maintain a separate waiting list that identifies how many applicants are waiting for accessible accommodation. This should include a breakdown of what features are required by applicants. This information should be included in the Annual Report.

RECOMMENDATION 16

4.24 The Committee recommends that the ACT Government examine measures that reduce or defer the need for social housing where the most appropriate accommodation for a person with a disability is with their family in their family home.

RECOMMENDATION 17

4.25 The Committee recommends that, where Housing ACT decides to move a person with a disability into more appropriate accommodation, prior consideration of that individual's access to community facilities and existing connections with family work and community are considered.

RECOMMENDATION 18

4.26 The Committee recommends that the ACT Government recognise the dire situation faced by ageing parents with children who have disabilities and examine the range of available services for these families. There should be a focus on options that provide care and accommodation for the whole family unit and provide appropriate ongoing options for the person with a disability.

RECOMMENDATION 19

4.27 The Committee recommends that Housing ACT annual reports include data relating to the provision of social housing for people with disabilities. This should be separated from general supported accommodation figures.

RECOMMENDATION 20

4.42 The Committee recommends that the ACT Government undertake a review of potential measures it can take to assist young people to obtain and maintain private rental tenancies. The ACT Government should consider establishing a private rental bond scheme or provide references relating to school attendances and the like as part of the review.

RECOMMENDATION 21

4.46 The Committee recommends that Housing ACT explores options aimed at enabling increased stability in the supply of houses to the Refugee Transitional Housing Program and an extension of the transitional period to 12 months.

RECOMMENDATION 22

4.49 The Committee recommends that a mental health housing strategy be developed in conjunction with community partners and in recognition of best practice.

RECOMMENDATION 23

4.50 The Committee recommends that the Housing and Accommodation Support Initiative be evaluated, and expanded if shown to have positive outcomes.

RECOMMENDATION 24

4.52 The Committee recommends that Housing ACT begin widely advertising that nominations are open for the next round of Joint Champions Group members and encourage widespread membership.

RECOMMENDATION 25

4.58 The Committee recommends that Housing ACT Annual Reports include information on the breakdown of properties that were not available for sale through the Shared Equity Scheme.

RECOMMENDATION 26

4.59 The Committee recommends that Housing ACT make available information on how to seek a review, or appeal a decision made in relation to purchasing a property through the Shared Equity Scheme.

RECOMMENDATION 27

5.17 The Committee recommends that the ACT Government consider the current asset management strategy an interim document, and immediately undertake activities to ensure that the information identified through best practice is collected and integrated into Housing ACT systems.

RECOMMENDATION 28

5.18 The Committee recommends that Housing ACT use the integrated system to develop a comprehensive maintenance and management strategy, and that this strategy be widely disseminated.

ABBREVIATIONS

AHURI	Australian Housing and Urban Research Institute
CSD	Community Services Directorate
DISH	Disability Information Support Hub
MDP	Multi-Disciplinary Panel
MUP	Multi unit properties
RTHP	Refugee Transitional Housing Program
PRHAP	Public Rental Housing Assistance Program

FOREWORD

Planning is essential if we are to avoid bright ideas that address one particular issue only to create disasters in other areas. The history of public housing is replete with such bright ideas.²

The key unresolved issue is the tension between housing affordability for tenants and financial viability for social housing organisations.³

This enquiry highlights the constant struggle for balance that the ACT faces when it comes to ensuring that the most vulnerable within our community have access to safe, secure, affordable housing.

This report recognises that provision of adequate social housing is an expensive process, and one heavily impacted by the relatively small size of land available for development. We do not believe diverting vulnerable people from social housing is the best solution.

The Report does not propose a major policy shift, nor the expenditure of significant amounts of public funds. Rather, it makes modest recommendations that can be adopted in the short term to alleviate some of the existing pressure.

These include development of a longer term asset management strategy that takes into account the ageing profile of tenants and the need for more energy efficient housing.

A large number of the recommendations do not require systematic change, but a re-examination of the current system to identify where things could be streamlined.

² Sean McNeils, *Rental systems in Australia and overseas*, AHURI Final Report No. 95, Australian Housing and Urban Research Institute, June 2006, p. 82.

³ *Ibid.*

STANDING COMMITTEE ON HEALTH, COMMUNITY AND SOCIAL
SERVICES

A consistent theme among those who made submissions was the difficulty of communicating with Housing ACT and the Community Services Directorate.

The Committee strongly encourages Housing ACT and the Community Services Directorate to maintain their focus on becoming a human services provider and accept that their communication methods need urgent attention and change.

Steve Doszpot

Chair

1 INTRODUCTION

Conduct of Inquiry

- 1.1 On 22 September 2011, pursuant to Standing Order 246A, the Committee Chair Mr Doszpot, made a statement on behalf of the Standing Committee on Health, Community and Social Services stating:

“At a private meeting on 31 August 2011, the Committee resolved to conduct an inquiry into the provision of social housing in the ACT.

Social Housing is provided by the ACT Government through Housing ACT to low income households and those people who are unable to find appropriate accommodation in the private rental market.

The Committee is concerned with the increasing demand for social housing in the ACT, fuelled by housing affordability and a competitive private rental market that makes it difficult for many individuals and families living on low-incomes, including many of our most vulnerable community members, from accessing suitable accommodation.”⁴

Social housing

- 1.2 Housing ACT describes social housing as the provision of low-cost housing to low and moderate income earners who are unable to secure private rental or home ownership. Social housing comprises public and community housing programs. Public housing is provided by ACT Government, while community housing is provided by community housing organisations funded by the ACT Government.⁵

⁴Legislative Assembly for the ACT, *Minutes of Proceedings*, 22 September 2011, pp. 4301–4302; available at <http://www.hansard.act.gov.au/hansard/2011/week10/4301.htm>.

⁵ACT Government, Community Services Website; http://www.dhcs.act.gov.au/hcs/social_housing/social_housing_and_homelessness_services, accessed at 17 July 2012.

1.3 The Australian Housing and Urban Research Institute (AHURI) defines social housing as a number of complex operation systems, including:

- An eligibility/allocations system which relates specific characteristics of applicants with the processes for determining who is eligible for social housing, the processes for determining their priority and the processes by which dwellings are chosen or allocated to applicants;
- A housing acquisition system which relates a standard of housing with the processes for raising of capital funds, the processes for determining these standards and the processes by which land and dwellings are acquired;
- An asset management system which relates a standard of housing with the processes for maintaining that standard, the process for bringing dwellings up to that standard and the processes for deciding whether and when to upgrade, demolish or sell dwellings;
- A property management system which relates an ongoing standard of maintenance and repair of properties with the processes whereby they are maintained;
- A tenancy management system which relates management of tenancies with processes whereby tenants and staff can interact and whereby tenants' rights are ensured; and
- A finance system which relates different transactions – capital and operating – with processes for determining ongoing costs, with processes for determining rents and with processes for allocating subsidies.⁶

1.4 This analysis adequately reflects the complex administrative arrangements relating to the provision of social housing in the ACT.

1.5 The importance of providing safe social housing is widely recognised. The Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW) highlights the need for social housing within our communities, stating 'the availability of affordable, sustainable, and appropriate housing underpins good health and the social, educational and economic participation of individuals'.⁷

⁶ Sean McNeils, *op. cit.*, fn 2, p. 29.

⁷ Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, *Australia's Welfare 2011*, Canberra, 2011, p. 275.

The ACT Ombudsman's report

- 1.6 The Committee welcomes the report *Housing ACT, Assessment of an application for Priority housing*⁸ (the Report) and acknowledges the work of the ACT Ombudsman in raising systematic issues regarding the provision of social housing in the ACT.
- 1.7 The Report is based on an investigation of Ms A. In December 2009 Ms A, a single mother with three children, complained to the ACT Ombudsman about having been on Housing ACT's High Needs housing list for six months and not receiving any additional assistance from them, despite providing documentation to Housing ACT demonstrating that her housing situation was serious and deteriorating.
- 1.8 Each time Ms A provided additional information she was advised that her application for housing had been re-assessed and remained on the High Needs housing list.
- 1.9 The investigation by the ACT Ombudsman concluded that, as Ms A did not request that the initial Housing ACT decision be reviewed in writing, her application was never formally reviewed, and thus remained in the High Needs category. This greatly reduced the likelihood of her receiving the public housing accommodation she and her three young children needed.
- 1.10 The ACT Ombudsman found that Housing ACT:
 - did not provide Ms A with a level of procedural assistance that was reasonable for an applicant in her circumstances, and that would have enabled her to have her assessment formally reviewed;
 - failed to refer Ms A's application to the Multi-Disciplinary Panel (MDP) for placement on the Priority housing list, despite her meeting the eligibility criteria; and
 - should review its policies and procedures for re-assessing applications, and for triaging applications for Priority housing.

⁸ http://ombudsman.act.gov.au/files/investigation_2011_01.pdf

1.11 The Report highlights deficiencies in the application and review processes for social housing. It states:

‘We are concerned that the current review policy does not take into account the specific vulnerabilities of people experiencing homelessness, distress, anxiety, or who have limited levels of education or literacy.’⁹

⁹ ACT Ombudsman, *Housing ACT: Assessment of an application for priority housing*, Canberra, June 2011, p. 12.

2 ACT OMBUDSMAN'S REPORT AND ACT GOVERNMENT RESPONSE

- 2.1 The ACT Ombudsman made four recommendations in relation to the administrative processes associated with applying for social housing through Housing ACT.

Recommendation 1

Housing ACT should review the information provided to housing applicants to ensure that it clearly and succinctly explains the procedure by which an applicant can seek to have an application on the High Needs list escalated to the Priority list.

- 2.2 The Committee strongly agrees that Housing ACT needs to review the information provided to applicants. The Committee also makes a number of recommendations relating to transparency measures around decision making criteria, and time frames.
- 2.3 The Committee notes that the ACT Government agreed with the recommendation.

Recommendation 2

Housing ACT assist housing applicants to submit written requests for review where the applicant's circumstances suggest that more interactive assistance is needed. If necessary, Housing ACT should seek to have the Public Rental Housing Assistance Program (PRHAP) modified so that officers may provide assistance to housing applicants to make review requests.

- 2.4 The Committee agrees that under the *Human Rights Act 2004*, Housing ACT has a responsibility to act in a way that is consistent with human rights, and does not limit a person's right to life.¹⁰ This places an onus on Housing ACT to

¹⁰ The Committee notes that housing is considered a fundamental aspect of the right to life.

provide all reasonable assistance to an applicant, when it is identified that further assistance is necessary.

- 2.5 The Committee notes that the ACT Government agreed in principle with this recommendation, stating that no modification needs to be made to PRHAP to enable this level of assistance to be provided. The ACT Government also undertook to develop an operational guideline for reviews of decisions and to review existing operational guidelines on reassessment of applications.

Recommendation 3

Housing ACT either implement an internal review procedure for re-assessing applications in the light of further information provided by applicants, or cease referring to a re-assessment if no such procedure exists. An internal review procedure should include a referral of the application to an independent assessing officer, or senior assessing officer. Notifications of internal reviews should include reasons for the decision to maintain the application on the High Needs list if the application is not elevated to the Priority list.

- 2.6 The Committee agrees with this recommendation, and suggests that the internal review is an essential element of the review process. The Committee encourages the ACT Government to review its internal review policy and release this to the public upon completion.
- 2.7 The ACT Government agreed with this in principle, whilst disagreeing with the ACT Ombudsman that there was not a formal review process currently in place.

Recommendation 4

Housing ACT review its policy and procedure for triaging applications for Priority housing to ensure that a transparent and accountable process is in place. In developing clear requirements in relation to Clause 14, Housing ACT should ensure that these requirements are consistent with and provide support to its triaging process for sorting applications for referral to the MDP.

2.8 The Committee strongly agrees with this recommendation. The evidence heard before this Inquiry highlights the need for clarity and transparency in all process associated with priority housing.

2.9 The ACT Government disagreed with this recommendation, stating that:

Housing ACT does not support this recommendation as comparative assessment will unnecessarily increase pressures on the priority list and increase waiting times for people to be housed. Housing ACT is confident that all eligible applications are referred to the MDP. The triaging process is a necessary administrative process for the management of the high volume of applications received and reviewed within Gateway Services.

There are a number of supports in place to ensure all assessing officers have assistance to make the decisions required to manage their substantial workload, including weekly meetings with their team leader, informal meetings with their peers, meetings with the Manager and Senior Manager of Gateway Services and consultation with other senior officers within the department with specific expertise such as domestic violence or issues related to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander applicants.

This process is not inconsistent with PRHAP including determinations made under the program. The capacity to allocate a needs category to an application derives primarily from clause 13(3) of PRHAP but is supported by the determination relating to housing needs categories.

This power is delegated down to the AS04 level.

2.10 The Committee also strongly encourages the ACT Government to support the ACT Ombudsman's 10 Point Plan to improve ACT Government service delivery.¹¹

¹¹Available at http://ombudsman.act.gov.au/docs/ten_point_plan.pdf.

Gateway Quality Improvement Project

- 2.11 The ACT Government response to the Report refers heavily to the Gateway Quality Improvement Project. The response clarifies that ‘all of the systemic administrative and procedural issues regarding Housing ACT application and assessment procedures will be addressed by this project.’
- 2.12 Housing ACT describes the Gateway Quality Improvement Project as developing a Service Delivery Framework, which will take human services principles and apply them to existing practices.
- 2.13 Accompanying the Service Delivery Framework are a range of guidelines, similarly focused on the specific day-to-day work context of Gateway Services, to assist staff to interpret and apply the policy and procedures of the organisation.
- 2.14 The project also includes a business system review to identify where systems, could better maximise support to clients and staff and provide managers and the organisation with the oversight required to ensure consistent and transparent practice. This will be followed with a quality assurance regime and a training schedule to ensure the expectations outlined in the Service Delivery Framework and guidelines become embedded in day-to-day practice into the future and that these can be adequately monitored.

RECOMMENDATION 1

- 2.15 **The Committee recommends that Housing ACT undertake a review of the Gateway Quality Improvement Project. This review should include reference to all areas of concern identified by the ACT Ombudsman’s Report and be widely disseminated.**

3 SOCIAL HOUSING IN THE ACT

- 3.1 The ACT Government currently manages 11,484 social housing properties through Housing ACT, an agency that operates within the Community Services Directorate.¹²
- 3.2 Housing ACT figures show that from July 2010 to June 2011 25,245 people in the ACT accessed social housing through 11,483 tenancies.¹³
- 3.3 Housing ACT has made a public commitment to increasing the number of properties available through social housing. The ACT Government has allocated \$5 million over three years to increase social housing stock.
- 3.4 However, Housing ACT failed to meet its target of managing 12,050 properties by the end of the 2011-12 financial year. In the Committee's recent Annual Report Inquiry public hearings, Housing ACT confirmed that the target will not be met until the end of the 2012-13 financial year. Housing ACT identified large scale redevelopment projects as responsible for the delay in meeting the target, and anticipates that the target will be met upon the completion of those projects.¹⁴

Accessing social housing in the ACT

Application Process

- 3.5 The application process for social housing has been streamlined over the past two years and a central hub for all housing enquiries, including emergency and homelessness services, has been established. Gateway Services, the central access point, operates out of Belconnen with outreach and hot phone services located throughout the Territory.

¹² Note that this excludes properties transferred to community and affordable housing providers. David Collett, *Transcript of Evidence*, 29 June 2012, p. 1282.

¹³ ACT Government, *Community Services Directorate Annual Report 2010-2011*, p. 108.

¹⁴ David Collett, *Transcript of Evidence*, 29 June 2012, p. 1282.

- 3.6 Housing ACT encourages applicants to ring, make an appointment and then appear at Gateway with their application form completed. The Committee notes that this assumes applicants have access to a working telephone and the ability to complete the application form. In this meeting Housing ACT identifies if any further information is required and applicants are given information on the types of housing available and waiting times.
- 3.7 The application form is in plain English, and requires a significant amount of documentation to be attached. The Committee questions if some of this information is best provided when a potential home is identified in order to minimise the need for applicants to update Housing ACT while waiting for a home.
- 3.8 A submission to the Inquiry highlighted concerns with the central access point, arguing that whilst the central access point was designed to provide an accessible venue for a range of housing options, its single location at Belconnen makes it inaccessible to people who have limited access to transport. The submission provided an example highlighting this in relation to viewing properties:
- When applicants are called to inspect a potential property they must go to the central access point to collect the property keys, go view the property, and return the keys to Belconnen, all in the one business day. Where applicants have no option but to use public transport this can be incredibly difficult. In the past where people were able to collect keys from a choice of regional shopfronts this was more accessible.¹⁵
- 3.9 The Committee understands that the first step for many applicants is to access the CSD website and seek information on how to apply, eligibility requirements, the standard application process and types of properties available. The Committee is concerned that the social housing section of the CSD website is not kept up to date, and does not provide the full scope of information that applicants seek. Further, the forms and policy section of the website is listed in alphabetical order, not according to the most commonly accessed documents, or standard application process. The Committee believes

¹⁵ Submission 15, ACTCOSS, available at <http://www.parliament.act.gov.au/committees/index1.asp?committee=115&inquiry=1022&category=14>.

that the existing organisation of information has the potential to hinder accessibility.

- 3.10 A key example of this is the Public Rental Housing Assistance Program (PRHAP) policy document. Referred to as PRHAP in many Housing ACT documents, and in the public hearings by the then Director of Community Services Directorate, on the CSD website it is referred to as the 'allocations policy', and fails to include any link to the legislation register or to clause numbers in the notifiable instrument. This means that an applicant or tenant would be significantly disadvantaged if a piece of correspondence from Housing ACT referred to PRHAP or a clause therein.

RECOMMENDATION 2

- 3.11 **The Committee recommends that Housing ACT undertake an audit of its website and ensure that:**
- a. All documents are dated.**
 - b. All documents are presented by when they are most commonly required according to the social housing cycle, instead of the current alphabet approach. For example, information about accepting a property should follow information about the application process.**
 - c. All links to legislation on the website and within documents provided are current.**
 - d. Information on the waiting time for different models of community housing is provided.**

RECOMMENDATION 3

- 3.12 **The Committee recommends that Housing ACT only require essential eligibility documentation at initial application interviews. Any other documentation, such as evidence of community based support services, should only be required when a suitable property is identified.**

RECOMMENDATION 4

- 3.13 **The Committee recommends that Housing ACT amend the current application form to include more information on the different types of social housing available, and the different management and rent arrangements for each particular type of housing.**

Criteria for social housing

- 3.14 To be eligible for social housing an applicant must be 16 years or older, in Australia lawfully (not subject to a time limit imposed by law) and a resident of the ACT for 6 months immediately before the assessment date.
- 3.15 The income threshold for applicants seeking rental housing assistance is \$628 gross per week for a single applicant, and from \$785 gross per week for families and joint tenants.
- 3.16 Eligibility for early allocation is only met when there are special circumstances. Such circumstances include: homelessness; mental health or medical issues; disability, including frail aged; women and children escaping domestic violence; indigenous persons facing complex issues; and children at risk, including their parents and carers.
- 3.17 Once applicants are assessed as eligible, they are prioritised in term of need according to the table below.

Needs Category	Needs Category typically includes, but is not limited to, applicants who are/have:
Priority Housing <i>Applicants must demonstrate exceptional, urgent and critical needs that cannot be resolved by any reasonable means other than the early provision of social housing.</i>	Able to demonstrate a range of complex needs with evidence of significant risk factors that would be addressed or substantially alleviated through the early allocation of social housing, including: • primary or secondary homelessness, including clients exiting specialist homelessness services; incarceration in a corrective services facility, or mental health or other health facility; • families with children, especially children who have experienced multiple housing moves and/or have school based medication needs and children aged up to five years in large multi unit properties • formally diagnosed mental health issues, including the effects of past trauma and torture; • other serious and chronic health issues;

Needs Category	Needs Category typically includes, but is not limited to, applicants who are/have:
	• disability including frail-aged, where natural supports have broken down, or are at serious risk of breaking down; • Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander persons and families facing complex issues; • women with or without children escaping domestic violence; • children at risk of abuse or neglect. Supplementary principles An applicant with a single risk factor may be considered for inclusion if that factor is assessed as being extremely critical or detrimental in relation to their well-being or that of their family. Inclusion will be confined to applicants who are currently capable of independent living and with the capacity to undertake a housing tenancy to address their longer term housing needs. A clear distinction will be made between applicants who meet these requirements and those for whom crisis or short-term housing is more appropriate to their needs.
High Needs Housing <i>Applicants must demonstrate significant needs that cannot be resolved by any reasonable means other than the provision of social housing within a reasonable timeframe.</i> <i>This includes significant affordability issues in obtaining housing on the private market.</i>	Able to demonstrate one or more risk factors that would be addressed or substantially alleviated through the provision of social housing, including: • existence of one or more of the risk factors identified for the priority housing category but to a degree that does not justify admission to that category; • experiencing private rental barriers such as extreme affordability problems, or demonstrable and ongoing discrimination; • having a need for housing that addresses special needs such as a disability or a chronic medical condition that cannot be reasonably catered for through the private housing market; • living in overcrowded conditions, placing children at an identifiable risk.
Standard Housing <i>Applicants facing significant affordability issues in obtaining housing on the private market</i>	Incomes within the income eligibility criteria specified in clause 9 of the Public Rental Housing Assistance Program.

- 3.18 Housing ACT staff determine initial eligibility between standard and high needs. If they consider an applicant may be eligible for priority housing they must refer the file to their senior manager who then presents it to the Multi-Disciplinary Panel (MDP). The MDP comprises representatives from across the Directorate, Mental Health ACT, and representatives from non-government agencies. In 2010 -11, the panel met on 34 occasions during which 629 applications were considered. Of these 548 (87%) were approved for priority housing.
- 3.19 The Committee heard a large amount of criticism surrounding the MDP in both the written submissions and public hearings. Although the Committee regards the creation of the panel and the ACT Government's decision to remove the cap on the number of applicants who could be on the priority housing list positively, many submissions state that the process required to have a file presented to the MDP takes far too long. There was also a significant amount of discussion at the public hearings suggesting that the MDP does not meet regularly enough for urgent cases.
- 3.20 One submission highlights flaws in the existing system:

If the assessing officer is of the view that the application may fit the priority category, the applicant is still sent a letter which states that they have been placed on the high needs list. Occasionally, we see cases where this letter contains a further paragraph indicating that the application is being considered for priority, but in most cases, the applicant is not informed that s/he is being considered for priority until s/he makes contact with HACT and speaks directly to the assessing officer. The decision to put an application forward for consideration for the priority list does not seem to be recorded and there is no information on the file about the reasons for the decision or the evidence taken into consideration.

The assessing officer (possibly following consultation with a more senior officer) then prepares a 'brief' which sets out the reasons why the application should be placed on the priority list. At this point, we often see applications disappear into a black hole as assessing officers appear to perform an informal triage, preparing briefs which are considered urgent ahead of applications which the officer considers less urgent. This

can lead to serious delays for applicants. We acted in a case in 2010 where we were informed that the application would be referred to the Multi-disciplinary Panel (MDP) on 1 July, but the brief was not completed until mid December. The brief finally came before the MDP at the end of December, more than 6 months after the application was made. In a more recent example, HACT indicated on 8 March 2011 that they would refer a matter for priority. The brief to the MDP was not completed until July and the matter did not go to MDP until 25 August 2011.

There are significant flaws in the decision making process and there are no records kept of at least one level of administrative decision making in this process. In addition, there is no information available about the criteria used for triaging applications. The use of subjective criteria in administrative decision-making is always of concern. However, it is doubly worrying where the criteria are not clearly articulated.’¹⁶

- 3.21 The ACT Ombudsman’s Report highlighted that, due to the volume of applications being referred to the senior assessing officer, Housing ACT allows applications to be subject to a comparative test conducted by a senior assessing officer - that is, the decision to present an application to the MDP depends on how their circumstances compare with other applicants whose applications are also on the high needs waiting list. The ACT Ombudsman strongly disagrees with this approach and argues that each applicant for Priority housing should be assessed on their own needs and circumstances alone, and placed on the Priority list if the MDP determines they meet the criteria. Once on the Priority list, existing policy justifies the application of a comparative test and the provision of housing on the basis of need rather than chronology.¹⁷

RECOMMENDATION 5

- 3.22 **The Committee recommends that all applications determined as eligible for priority housing be provided to the Multi-Disciplinary Panel, and that a comparative needs test be applied only after the Multi-Disciplinary Panel assess the application as eligible.**

¹⁶ Submission 10, Welfare Rights and Legal Centre, available at <http://www.parliament.act.gov.au/committees/index1.asp?committee=115&inquiry=1022&category=14>.

¹⁷ ACT Ombudsman, *op. cit.*, fn 9, p. 14.

Waiting List

- 3.23 Demand for public housing continues to exceed supply. Approximately 1,800 families are waiting for social housing in the ACT. A recent review of the waiting list conducted by Housing ACT found that, although standard housing wait list applications have declined, both high needs and priority housing applications have increased significantly. This has contributed to a 31 per cent overall increase in waiting list applicants between financial year 2006-07 and financial year 2010-11.¹⁸
- 3.24 The table below shows that the trend of increasing demand continues.

HOUSING APPLICATION WAITING LIST

	2007-08	2008-09	2009-10	July 2011
Applicants housing register	1 098	1 589	1 380	1811
Priority housing	32	88	69	190
High needs housing	728	1 015	881	1089
Standard housing	338	486	430	532

- 3.25 Housing ACT suggests that much of the pressure on the public housing system is a consequence of longer-term structural issues associated with private rental affordability and shortfalls in-low cost housing supply.¹⁹
- 3.26 The Committee feels that significant investment must be directed at families that are not in a financial position to meet the costs associated with affordable

¹⁸ ACT Government, *Public Housing Asset Management Strategy 2012-2017*, January 2012.

¹⁹ ACT Government, *Community Services Directorate Annual Report 2010-2011*, p. 109.

housing. It must be recognised of families who may never be in a position to participate in affordable housing projects need a greater range of community housing options. This is of great significance for older people or people with disabilities who wish to live independently.

- 3.27 The gap between public and community housing was identified by community groups. Shelter ACT commented that community housing in the ACT is moving towards affordable housing in that tenants are paying 74.9 per cent of market rent, rather than 25 per cent of income.²⁰ This means that community housing is becoming less affordable for families, increasing the pressure upon the public housing system.
- 3.28 The Committee agrees that more needs to be done to provide alternative housing options for families on low incomes.

Cost of accessing social housing

- 3.29 The amount of rent that a tenant pays for a social housing property varies according to its categorisation as public, community or affordable housing. If the property is managed by Housing ACT rent is either the market rate for the property or 25 per cent of the tenant's weekly gross income, whichever is lower. The rental rebate scheme covers the difference between market rent and a tenant's income in the latter case.
- 3.30 For tenants in affordable housing rent is calculated at 74.9 per cent of market rent.
- 3.31 For tenants of community housing properties, rent is either a percentage of market rent or income. Tenants of community and affordable housing are regularly required to pay rent two weeks in advance and a bond at the commencement of a tenancy. To assist tenants with the cost of the bond, a rental bonds scheme is managed by Housing ACT.

²⁰ Estimates hearings, 15 June 2012.

- 3.32 By 30 June 2011, over 90 per cent of tenants in public housing were in receipt of a rental rebate. The total rental subsidy provided to tenants was \$120 million. This compares to \$114 million in 2009-10.²¹
- 3.33 The significant growth in the amount of total rental subsidy evidences how the price of rental properties has grown in the ACT and the pressure facing those on low incomes and those with specific needs due to ageing or disability.
- 3.34 Housing ACT suggests this demonstrates social housing in the ACT is targeted to the most vulnerable in the community.
- 3.35 Rental rebates are granted for six months at a time. Towards the end of this period, Housing ACT send tenants a reminder letter and an application for continuation of the rebate. In the absence of an application, the tenant is charged market-related rent. Proof of household income must be provided with each application for the rental rebate to continue.
- 3.36 The Committee strongly questions why a period of six months was chosen, and wonders if it is appropriate to put this reporting pressure on tenants when research shows that market rent prices continue to outgrow increases in average income.

RECOMMENDATION 6

- 3.37 **The Committee recommends that the rental rebate scheme be reassessed on a 12 monthly basis, instead of the current six months.**
- 3.38 Although Housing ACT operates a market rent system, due to high property values in the Territory, 90 per cent of tenants access the rental rebate scheme, which results in their rent amount being calculated on their income, and not the market value of the property.
- 3.39 AHURI research shows that one key weakness of the income-related rental system is that while rents are adjusted according to a household's income, they do not reflect the location, quality and amenity of dwellings. Thus tenants

²¹ ACT Government, *Community Services Directorate Annual Report 2010-2011*, p. 110.

living in older stock in poor condition could be paying the same rent as those on similar incomes living in good quality housing in sought-after locations.²²

- 3.40 AHURI found that in Australia the income-related rental system has also created problems for some tenants who have other income-earning dependent or non-dependent residents, particularly in recent years as the rental formula has increased the contribution expected from these residents in some community housing. The tenants were reluctant to seek rent contributions from other household members, particularly children. Where these residents would not contribute, the burden of paying rent and sustaining the tenancy was borne solely by the tenant.
- 3.41 AHURI also found that the current income-related rental system was one among a number of policies (such as income and tax policies) that potentially created work disincentives for tenants.²³
- 3.42 AHURI also found that both tenants and housing practitioners considered income-related rental systems complex and intrusive as they required regular income reviews, extensive documentation from tenants and intrusive administration from housing providers.²⁴
- 3.43 The Committee notes that in other countries, tenants contributions to social housing is based on the type and size of property with affordability linked to households with common characteristics, rather than the circumstances of each individual household.²⁵
- 3.44 Additional international strategies designed to counter these concerns include:
- disregarding some earned income in assessing rents, possibly as a short-term measure to assist the transition to work or over a longer time period;
 - offering arrangements in which the rent increases that would have been charged due to increased earnings from work are deposited in a savings account for the tenant; and

²² Sean McNeils, *op. cit.*, fn 2, pp. 24-25.

²³ Sean McNeils, *op. cit.*, fn 2, pp. 24-25.

²⁴ Sean McNeils, *op. cit.*, fn 2, p. 25.

²⁵ Sean McNeils, *op. cit.*, fn 2, p. 34.

- making changes to rent-setting selectively in targeted areas where unemployment among public tenants is high to encourage participation.²⁶

Debt management

- 3.45 The Committee is concerned that the testimony provided by the community groups and the testimony of the Directorate, throughout the public hearings of this Inquiry and the recent Estimates Inquiry, do not show a mutual understanding of the policies and practices involved in determining a minimum repayment amount. Community groups raised the issue of \$15 minimum weekly payments for debts, yet the Directorate informed the Committee that the policy stipulates that no tenant pay more than 30 per cent of their weekly income, including their rent and repayment of any debt. The Directorate stated that they are always open to negotiate payment schedules.²⁷
- 3.46 At 30 June 2011, rental arrears for public housing tenants were \$1,282,732. Total tenant rental debt including community housing and disability housing was \$1,693,362.²⁸

RECOMMENDATION 7

- 3.47 **The Committee recommends that Housing ACT undertake urgent stakeholder discussions in relation to the policy on repaying debts, and publish a plain English document for tenants explaining the policy and the correct method for calculating the minimum repayment amount.**

Process for appeals

- 3.48 The case of Ms A highlights how essential it is to be clear on procedures for review.²⁹

²⁶ Sean McNeils, *op. cit.*, fn 2, p. 92.

²⁷ Ms Maureen Sheehan, *Transcript of Evidence*, 29 June 2012, p 1277.

²⁸ ACT Government, *Community Services Directorate Annual Report 2010-2011*, p. 110.

²⁹ Refer to earlier discussion in paragraph 1.9 for information on the operation of the current review processes.

3.49 The Housing ACT website provides:

If you think a Housing ACT decision is unfair or wrong you can ask for it to be reviewed. There are two levels of review. The first level of review is by a senior officer in the area where the original decision was made.

Where there is new information or changed circumstances, *please tell us*, as this could affect the decision. Please provide documents that confirm the changes. *We can then arrange for the decision to be re-examined on the basis of new and relevant information by an officer more senior to the original decision maker* [emphasis added].

If still not satisfied, you can have the decision reviewed formally. In order to appeal formally, complete an Application for Review of Decision form. You should say why you disagree with the decision and request that it be reviewed within 28 days of receiving a letter telling you of Housing ACT's decision. You will be advised in writing of the outcome of this review.

If you do not agree with the outcome of the review, you will be given the opportunity to seek a second level review. The second level depends on the nature of the matter. The request for a review should be in writing. The Housing Assistance and Tenancy Review Panel (HATRP) meets regularly to review decisions made. The HATRP is made up of Senior Managers of Housing ACT who were not involved in the original decision. *The HATRP cannot overturn the original decision but it can make a recommendation to the Delegate of the Commissioner for Social Housing* [emphasis added] about how the matter should be resolved.

If you do not agree with the outcome you may take the matter to the ACT Civil and Administrative Tribunal.

3.50 The Committee highlights that the requirement for an applicant to request a review in writing is not prescribed until you proceed with a formal review. This implies that an initial review will be conducted upon verbal request. There is also no maximum time frame given for how long the initial review will take to complete.

- 3.51 The Committee considers the appeal process a fundamental aspect of the social housing process and considers it essential that appeals follow a transparent and easy to understand process that takes into account the vulnerability of individuals seeking housing assistance.
- 3.52 The Committee is concerned at the lack of documentation around the appeals process available to the public. There are no guidelines or decision-making frameworks available, nor is there advice in relation to expected time frames for any level of review.
- 3.53 The Committee also notes that there is no protection mentioned for applicants that appeal a decision. The fear of being punished upon making an appeal is real for those who feel aggrieved, and although mentioned in the service charter, should be explicitly stated.

RECOMMENDATION 8

- 3.54 **The Committee recommends that Housing ACT conduct an audit of its policy and procedures for administrative decision appeals. Policies should include guidance on what elements are to be considered, when an applicant will be informed of the decision, and ensure applicants are provided with reasons for the decision.**

RECOMMENDATION 9

- 3.55 **The Committee recommends that Housing ACT release a fact sheet detailing its appeal process. This should be widely disseminated.**

Complaints

- 3.56 Complaints made to Housing ACT are managed by the Complaints Management Unit. The Unit is responsible for the registration and tracking of all complaints and ensuring that complaints are dealt with fairly, impartially and within prescribed time frames.

- 3.57 During the 2011-12 financial year, the Complaints Unit handled approximately 2,617 complaints. Complaints can be broken down into subject matter.³⁰

Complaint type	Number of complaints received
Disruptive behaviour	890
Maintenance requests	471
Debt repayments/calculation	357
Property condition	256
Allegations of fraud	133
Treatment by Housing ACT staff	187
Various	323

- 3.58 The ACT Ombudsman informed the Committee that from 1 July 2011 to November 2011, the ACT Ombudsman's office received 61 complaints about Housing ACT. Fourteen of these complaints were investigated. Six of these were about delays or errors in the assessment of applications for housing assistance or transfer applications.³¹
- 3.59 The ACT Ombudsman clarified that more recent complaints indicate that the occurrence and effectiveness of meaningful re-assessment is still limited. The ACT Ombudsman is aware of recent complaints where applicants have provided further details and support documents, but this has not triggered action on, or escalation of, the housing application to the extent that the applicants were reasonably expecting it should.³²
- 3.60 The Committee is concerned at the number of complaints received, and the nature of the complaints received. The Committee is especially concerned that complaints similar in nature to Ms A continue to be made to the ACT Ombudsman, and encourages Housing ACT to fully implement the ACT Ombudsman's recommendation to prevent future incidents.

RECOMMENDATION 10

- 3.61 **The Committee recommends that Housing ACT re-examine their data collection system for complaints, and provide information regarding**

³⁰ ACT Government, *Community Services Directorate Annual Report 2010-2011*, p. 119.

³¹ Submission 11, ACT Ombudsman, available at <http://www.parliament.act.gov.au/committees/index1.asp?committee=115&inquiry=1022&category=14>.

³² Submission 11, ACT Ombudsman, available at <http://www.parliament.act.gov.au/committees/index1.asp?committee=115&inquiry=1022&category=14>.

the number of resolved matters in their Annual Report. Data surrounding outcomes from unresolved matters should also be included.

Communication

- 3.62 The Committee heard that all methods of communication to and from Housing ACT tend to be ineffective and have the potential to adversely affect each applicant and tenant. The Committee was very concerned that this was the consistent message from every single witness during the Inquiry, excluding the ACT Government. The Committee heard many examples of calls not being returned, documentation being lost and reports never being written, despite verbal confirmation.
- 3.63 The Committee also heard that ‘there is a lack of transparency in the housing process. Applications are not given clear reasons for decisions, timeframes for processing applications are not clear and limited feedback is provided.’³³
- 3.64 The Committee was informed that the poor communication was evident with individual applicants and tenants, in addition to advocates and to community service organisations. The ACT Ombudsman experienced this also.
- 3.65 The Committee is gravely concerned that Housing ACT is not fulfilling its service charter and potentially breaching the *Human Rights Act 2008* through its failure to appropriately communicate and record its decision-making processes.

RECOMMENDATION 11

- 3.66 **The Committee strongly recommends that Housing ACT devise a joint communication strategy with all relevant Government agencies, including the Health Directorate and Disability ACT, and community organisations that regularly engage with tenants. This strategy should be based on the submissions received by the Committee during this Inquiry and be widely disseminated.**

³³ Submission 3, ACT Disability Advocacy Network, available at <http://www.parliament.act.gov.au/committees/index1.asp?committee=115&inquiry=1022&category=14>.

4 RANGE OF ACT SOCIAL HOUSING STOCK

- 4.1 There is a range of social housing stock in the ACT. Of the total housing stock, 64 per cent are houses and 22 per cent are flats.³⁴ Of the flats, 83 per cent are located in multi-unit properties (MUPs).
- 4.2 The Housing ACT *Asset Management Strategy* highlights that, while several of the MUPs are in high-value locations and are well located near shopping centres and public transport, they can be subject to problems, with many being over 40 years old and requiring high levels of maintenance. They are limited in the types of households they can accommodate and may not comply with current standards or building codes. They are also not the most appropriate allocations for clients with high and complex needs, who will often require increased levels of support from community agencies and Housing ACT to sustain tenancies, and are often sites where these complex needs can cause impacts on the community.³⁵
- 4.3 At 31 October 2011 ACT social housing dwellings comprised:
- 132 bedsitters;
 - 2,101 one bedroom properties;
 - 3,629 two bedroom properties;
 - 4,994 three bedroom properties;
 - 822 four bedroom properties;
 - 173 five or more bedroom properties; and
 - 8 boarding houses (inclusive of the dwellings in the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Boarding House network).³⁶
- 4.4 The property requirements for people in need of social housing continue to change. The number of people seeking two or less and four or more bedroom

³⁴ Note the remaining 14 per cent is specific older persons accommodation.

³⁵ ACT Government, *Public Housing Asset Management Strategy 2012-2017*, January 2012.

³⁶ *Ibid.*

housing is growing while the number of those seeking three bedroom homes is falling. Recent data shows that 53 per cent of applicants seek two or less bedrooms, with 26 per cent seeking three bedrooms and 20 per cent seeking properties with four or more bedrooms.³⁷

4.5 While the proportion of three bedroom properties no longer reflects the demand, realigning stock takes time. The movement of people through three bedroom properties is slower than through other properties, and three bedroom properties are able to be allocated to a broad range of tenants.³⁸

4.6 Under the capital program, 369 dwellings were acquired in 2010-11. This included:

- 15 one-bedroom properties;
- 308 two-bedroom properties;
- 25 three-bedroom properties;
- 15 four-bedroom properties; and
- 6 five-bedroom properties.³⁹

4.7 The Committee understands that the 2012-13 Budget includes \$5 million for the provision of additional social housing stock.

Housing for people with disabilities

Provision of accommodation

4.8 The 2012-13 Budget allotted \$3 million in capital funding for the construction of dual occupancy dwellings for people with disabilities. A further \$5 million over three years has been committed to construct new supported accommodation facilities.

4.9 The Committee understands that the ACT Government has allocated \$500,000 of these funds to research innovative housing solutions for people with disabilities, and will then use the remaining \$4.5 million to construct accommodation based on research and best practice findings.

³⁷ ACT Government, *Public Housing Asset Management Strategy 2012-2017*, January 2012.

³⁸ *Ibid.*

³⁹ ACT Government, *Community Services Directorate Annual Report 2010-2011*, p. 111.

4.10 The Committee acknowledges the innovative working models associated with Ross Walker Lodge, Ainslie Village and the Intentional Community, and encourages Housing ACT to engage the local community organisations involved with the design and ongoing management of these facilities in their research process. The Committee acknowledges the work of community groups involved for their ongoing commitment to the provision of appropriate housing for people with disabilities.

4.11 Stepping Stones for Life, a community organisation associated with the management of Ross Walker Lodge and Ainslie Village highlight that:

There is a need to recognise the importance of individualised solutions, while at the same time drawing together types and grades of disabilities to facilitate some generalisation of physical solutions. The principle governing accommodation policy formulation is to provide for a wide variety of options which are adaptable and sustainable.⁴⁰

4.12 Stepping Stones for Life also emphasised that:

The location of allocated social housing is important to the residents for the acceptance and friendliness of the community in which it is located and its proximity to facilities such as familiar shops, bus routes and employment opportunities. It is also important to families and friends to assist visiting opportunities in both directions. Selection should be mindful of the need to avoid social and geographic isolation for the residents and families.⁴¹

RECOMMENDATION 12

4.13 **The Committee recommends that Housing ACT engage local community organisations involved with the design and ongoing management of accommodation facilities for people with disabilities in their upcoming research process examining alternative models of supported housing.**

⁴⁰ Submission 1, Stepping Stones for Life, available at <http://www.parliament.act.gov.au/committees/index1.asp?committee=115&inquiry=1022&category=14>.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*

Application process and tenancy agreements

- 4.14 Housing for people with disabilities is provided in houses owned and funded by the ACT Government and managed by Disability ACT or a community organisation. Different houses have different eligibility and access arrangements but group home tenants often have tenancy agreements with Housing ACT.⁴² A number of organisations, including the ACT Human Rights Commission, have raised concerns that this limits the rights of people with disabilities and potentially jeopardises their Disability ACT service provision.
- 4.15 Criticisms of the tenancy agreements offered by Housing ACT include:
- placing too much onus on the person with a disability to manage the relationship with Housing ACT;
 - no provision for how the common areas of the house are leased;
 - no provision for the potential inclusion of additional tenants; and
 - no provision in regards to Disability ACT's responsibilities.
- 4.16 The Committee was concerned to hear from advocacy groups that Housing ACT refuses to include people with disabilities on the social housing register without them providing evidence of personal support. One advocacy group stated that Housing ACT 'demanded HACC funds be secured for an individual before lodging their Housing ACT application.' The advocacy group explains that, in these instances, the only option is for a person to seek additional support services designed to meet their support needs in the future, even though the support is not needed until housing is provided.⁴³
- 4.17 This is alarming as it places increased pressure upon limited support services, possibly diverts services from other individuals, and encourages dependency upon the additional support in the waiting period prior to receiving a home.
- 4.18 With regard to the application process, a number of submissions to the inquiry highlighted the need for clarity in relation to who is seeking supported accommodation, and what stock is suitable for people with disabilities.⁴⁴ The

⁴² Submission 3, ACT Disability Advocacy Network, available at <http://www.parliament.act.gov.au/committees/index1.asp?committee=115&inquiry=1022&category=14>.

⁴³ *Ibid.*

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*

Committee agrees that identifying the demand for accessible housing is essential to designing a suitable range of stock.

- 4.19 The Committee also heard that people with disabilities can spend longer on the priority list due to the lack of suitable housing options,⁴⁵ and that the demand for social housing for people with disabilities is masked by parents taking the responsibility for longer than they are reasonably able.⁴⁶
- 4.20 The Committee understands that the new Disability Information and Support Hub (DISH) has opened. DISH is an accessible information hub which brings different areas of the community sector together with the ACT Government delivered services to assist people with disabilities living in the ACT. One of the key resources available at DISH is a housing options coordinator who is able to assist people with a disability to identify and develop housing options that suit their needs. The Committee is eager to see evaluation results from the centre.

RECOMMENDATION 13

- 4.21 **The Committee recommends that Housing ACT only seek evidence of appropriate individual support needs when a suitable property becomes available. A person with a disability should have 30 days to provide evidence of appropriate support from the date of offer, not at the time of applying for social housing.**

RECOMMENDATION 14

- 4.22 **The Committee recommends that Housing ACT maintain a register of properties that are suitable for people with disabilities, ranked to show what accessible components are available within that property.**

RECOMMENDATION 15

- 4.23 **The Committee recommends that Housing ACT maintain a separate waiting list that identifies how many applicants are waiting for accessible accommodation. This should include a breakdown of what**

⁴⁵ Submission 3, ACT Disability Advocacy Network, available at <http://www.parliament.act.gov.au/committees/index1.asp?committee=115&inquiry=1022&category=14>.

⁴⁶ *Op. cit.*, fn 40.

features are required by applicants. This information should be included in the Annual Report.

RECOMMENDATION 16

- 4.24 The Committee recommends that the ACT Government examine measures that reduce or defer the need for social housing where the most appropriate accommodation for a person with a disability is with their family in their family home.**

RECOMMENDATION 17

- 4.25 The Committee recommends that, where Housing ACT decides to move a person with a disability into more appropriate accommodation, prior consideration of that individual's access to community facilities and existing connections with family work and community are considered.**

RECOMMENDATION 18

- 4.26 The Committee recommends that the ACT Government recognise the dire situation faced by ageing parents with children who have disabilities and examine the range of available services for these families. There should be a focus on options that provide care and accommodation for the whole family unit and provide appropriate ongoing options for the person with a disability.**

RECOMMENDATION 19

- 4.27 The Committee recommends that Housing ACT annual reports include data relating to the provision of social housing for people with disabilities. This should be separated from general supported accommodation figures.**

Housing for older people

- 4.28 The Committee acknowledges that Housing ACT has undertaken a number of initiatives to provide additional security for older people in social housing. These include the modification of homes to include sliding door and window**

locks, protective screens, additional external lighting and some garden maintenance to remove furtive spaces around the buildings.⁴⁷

- 4.29 The Committee also notes the recent growth of stock designed for older people, with the addition of 297 homes built in 2011-12, and the program designed to move older tenants into these new properties, freeing up larger family homes for young families. At 30 June 2011, approximately 145 properties had been returned to Housing ACT for reallocation to families under this program.⁴⁸
- 4.30 The Committee understands that, in addition to the new stock, 137 modifications to properties were undertaken at a total cost of approximately \$900,000 in the 2011-12 financial year.⁴⁹ This is positive as research shows that minor adaptations such as grab rails, handrails, ramps, over-bath showers and door entry systems produce lasting positive consequences, while major adaptations such as bathroom conversions, extensions and lifts often transform people's lives.⁵⁰
- 4.31 The Committee highlights that social housing providers will face increasing demand for public housing from older people in the coming years. Demographic projections in a recent AHURI study forecast an increase in demand of 76 per cent in the next five years.⁵¹ This is concerning as currently public housing in Australia only meets 42 per cent of demand from eligible older persons.⁵²
- 4.32 AHURI found that compared to all older persons, those in public housing are more likely:
- To be in fair or poor health, or have a disability or long-term health condition;
 - To have difficulty getting out of their home and to the places needed;

⁴⁷ David Collett, *Transcript of Evidence*, 29 June 2012, pp. 1273-1274.

⁴⁸ ACT Government, *Community Services Directorate Annual Report 2010-2011*, p. 115.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 113.

⁵⁰ F. Heywood, *Money Well Spent: The Effectiveness and Value of Housing Adaptations*, Policy Press, Bristol in Sean McNelis and Caroline Neske with Andrew Jones and Rhonda Phillips, *Older persons in public housing: the policy and management issues*, AHURI Final Report No. 121, Australian Housing and Urban Research Institute, August 2008, p. 40.

⁵¹ Sean McNelis and Caroline Neske with Andrew Jones and Rhonda Phillips, *Older persons in public housing: the policy and management issues*, AHURI Final Report No. 121, Australian Housing and Urban Research Institute, August 2008, p. 6.

⁵² *Ibid.*

- To feel unsafe in their home, both during the day and after dark;
- To have greater difficulty paying household bills and little capacity to raise emergency money;
- To have no contact with family or relatives outside the household;
- Not to participate in social, leisure, cultural and sporting activities outside their home;
- Not to have access to a computer or to the internet.⁵³

4.33 This research emphasises the need for an integrated service approach to housing for older people. Social isolation is linked to a number of mental and physical health factors.

Housing for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people

4.34 The Committee notes that Housing ACT maintains its target for 10 per cent of total social housing stock to be occupied by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. The Committee also notes that individuals have to self-identify as Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander. As such, it is difficult for Housing ACT to determine what percentage of stock is allocated to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. Despite this, there has been an increase in the number of self-identified Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander tenancies from 435 in June 2010 to 520 in June 2011. Housing ACT estimates that these tenancies house a total of 1,147 residents.⁵⁴

4.35 Housing ACT contracts Inanna to manage the Indigenous Boarding House Program. The program provides short-term accommodation, with six properties, for families who have relatives in hospital or in the Alexander Maconochie Centre, students studying at ACT Universities and other educational institutions, and men taking time out from families where family violence is occurring.⁵⁵

4.36 The Committee is aware of Billabong Aboriginal Development Corporation being required to transfer a significant proportion of their stock to Housing

⁵³ Sean McNelis et. al. *op. cit.*, fn 51, pp. 13-14.

⁵⁴ ACT Government, *Community Services Directorate Annual Report 2010-2011*, p. 108.

⁵⁵ *Ibid*, p. 114.

ACT due to the introduction of the Housing Registration system within the *Housing Assistance Act 2008*. The Committee is concerned that the provision of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander and other culturally specific housing in the ACT is being restricted by a limited interpretation approach.

Housing for young people

- 4.37 The Committee acknowledges that young people are finding the cost and availability of housing in the ACT an increasing pressure due to the lack of affordable housing available in the Territory. Many young people report difficulty gaining entry to the private rental market in the ACT due to cost, availability and discrimination.⁵⁶
- 4.38 The Committee heard that many young people in Canberra experience housing stress or homelessness. On any given night in Canberra, data indicates that 818 people under 25 years of age do not have somewhere to sleep. Of particular concern is that 22 per cent of all the homeless people recorded in Canberra are under the age of 12.⁵⁷
- 4.39 Housing ACT operates the Youth Housing Program,⁵⁸ which supports 143 young tenants to sustain long-term tenancies and to engage with education, employment and the community. The Program specifically targets young people aged 16 to 25 who are transitioning from the Youth Community Justice System, Care and Protection or Homelessness Services. Housing ACT employs two youth housing managers and a team leader to engage with the young people. Housing ACT staff work with young people from their initial contact with Housing ACT, through the application and allocation process and on to tenancy management.
- 4.40 At 30 June 2011, 143 youth tenancies were managed under the Program, an increase of 20 tenancies in 2010-11. All but one youth tenancy has been sustained since the commencement of the Program. This demonstrates the success of the model.

⁵⁶ Submission 9, Youth Coalition of the ACT, available at <http://www.parliament.act.gov.au/committees/index1.asp?committee=115&inquiry=1022&category=14>.

⁵⁷ Australian Bureau of Statistics, *Counting the Homeless Report*, Australian Government, 2006.

⁵⁸ ACT Government, *Community Services Directorate Annual Report 2010-2011*, p. 108.

- 4.41 The Youth Boarding House managed by Lowanna also continues to provide long-term accommodation for six young Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.⁵⁹

RECOMMENDATION 20

- 4.42 **The Committee recommends that the ACT Government undertake a review of potential measures it can take to assist young people to obtain and maintain private rental tenancies. The ACT Government should consider establishing a private rental bond scheme or provide references relating to school attendances and the like as part of the review.**

Housing for refugees and recently arrived migrants

- 4.43 The Refugee Transitional Housing Program (RTHP) provides transitional housing for six months to newly arrived people in Canberra. The program uses Housing ACT properties that are due to be redeveloped or sold. The Committee understands that although properties are often old and ready for sale or redevelopment, most houses have been appropriate and often family friendly with gardens and close to shops and transport.⁶⁰
- 4.44 The demand for transitional housing is great, whilst the program has rarely reached the program's target of 16 houses in operation. The Committee heard that there are usually only 6 to 10 houses available for the program at any given time.⁶¹
- 4.45 The Committee understands that due to the six-month residency eligibility requirement of Housing ACT, newly arrived migrants can only lodge an application for social housing once their access to the RTHP has terminated. This means that newly arrived refugees and asylum seekers must find housing in the private rental market whilst waiting for social housing.⁶²

⁵⁹ ACT Government, *Community Services Directorate Annual Report 2010-2011*, p. 118.

⁶⁰ Submission 7, Companion House, available at

<http://www.parliament.act.gov.au/committees/index1.asp?committee=115&inquiry=1022&category=14>.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*

⁶² *Ibid.*

RECOMMENDATION 21

- 4.46 **The Committee recommends that Housing ACT explores options aimed at enabling increased stability in the supply of houses to the Refugee Transitional Housing Program and an extension of the transitional period to 12 months.**

Allied programs**Housing and Accommodation Support Initiative**

- 4.47 In partnership between Housing ACT, ACT Mental Health and community based mental health agencies, ten integrated packages for housing, mental health and personal support have been established to support sustainable tenancies in public housing for people with moderate to severe mental health issues.⁶³
- 4.48 Evaluation of the NSW Housing and Accommodation Support Initiative showed significant increases in community participation, maintenance of tenancies, improved physical health, reduced hospitalisation rates and connection with services among participants.⁶⁴

RECOMMENDATION 22

- 4.49 **The Committee recommends that a mental health housing strategy be developed in conjunction with community partners and in recognition of best practice.**

RECOMMENDATION 23

- 4.50 **The Committee recommends that the Housing and Accommodation Support Initiative be evaluated, and expanded if shown to have positive outcomes.**

Joint Champions Group – Tenant Participation

- 4.51 The Joint Champions Group (JCG), established in 2005, provides tenants with

⁶³ ACT Government, *Community Services Directorate Annual Report 2010-2011*, p. 115.

⁶⁴ Submission 5, Mental Health Community Coalition ACT, available at <http://www.parliament.act.gov.au/committees/index1.asp?committee=115&inquiry=1022&category=14>.

an opportunity to contribute to the planning and delivery of public housing services in the ACT. The JCG comprises public housing tenants, Housing ACT staff, and representatives from community organisations. Meetings are held on a regular basis with a combined general meeting held twice during the year. Four rounds of work groups were held throughout the year. Membership is for a two-year period and the current group's term expired in December 2011.⁶⁵

RECOMMENDATION 24

- 4.52 **The Committee recommends that Housing ACT begin widely advertising that nominations are open for the next round of Joint Champions Group members and encourage widespread membership.**

Shared Equity Scheme

- 4.53 The Shared Equity Scheme allows eligible head tenants to purchase 70 per cent of their Housing ACT property upfront, with IMB providing the finance. The remaining 30 per cent equity of the property remains with Housing ACT. The purchaser agrees to progressively purchase this equity from Housing ACT over a maximum 15 year period.
- 4.54 A total of 56 applications were received in 2010-11. Thirty-seven applications did not proceed, either because the tenant decided not to proceed with the sale or the houses were not for available for sale. There have been a total of 14 properties purchased under the shared equity scheme.
- 4.55 The Committee is encouraged to hear that several purchasers advised that following the introduction of the shared equity scheme they were able to purchase the property they lived in, which they could not have otherwise afforded to do.
- 4.56 At 30 June 2011 two purchasers have chosen to pay out the Commissioner for Social Housing's equity share.⁶⁶

⁶⁵ ACT Government, *Community Services Directorate Annual Report 2010-2011*, p. 115.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*

- 4.57 The Committee is eager to know what percentage of properties were not available for sale and the reasons they were not available for sale. If this is a matter of discretion, the Committee considers it essential that these decisions are reviewable.

RECOMMENDATION 25

- 4.58 **The Committee recommends that Housing ACT Annual Reports include information on the breakdown of properties that were not available for sale through the Shared Equity Scheme.**

RECOMMENDATION 26

- 4.59 **The Committee recommends that Housing ACT make available information on how to seek a review, or appeal a decision made in relation to purchasing a property through the Shared Equity Scheme.**

5 MANAGING ACT SOCIAL HOUSING STOCK

- 5.1 Maintaining a complete asset management strategy is essential to the cost-effective functioning of a social housing program. AHURI defines asset management as a systematic process of planning, acquisition, transfer, re-organisation, improvement and management of physical assets in a cost-effective way. Asset management combines social and engineering principles with sound business practices and economic models to provide the tools necessary to facilitate a more effective approach toward decision-making for public housing.⁶⁷
- 5.2 AHURI highlights that the social housing 'challenge is not just because of funding constraints, poor design and ageing stock'⁶⁸ but because 'the complexity or the management tasks associated with demand and supply is so great that there are no quick and easy solutions.'⁶⁹ The Committee agrees with this assessment, and considers the current *ACT Asset Management Strategy* as lacking in detail with regard to future needs identification and analysis of asset value.
- 5.3 This has been identified as a concern in a study⁷⁰ that found social housing asset documents that are largely descriptive rather than analytical, tend to summarise the key features of the service instead of identifying their gains and shortcomings. Further, plans for improving service that lack detail are largely aspirational and fail to adequately consider how proposed reforms will be achieved.⁷¹ The study also observed that statements lacked understanding of the degree of tenant involvement necessary for housing improvement and

⁶⁷ Russell Kenley, Maxwell Chiazor, Christopher Heywood and Sean McNeil's, *Towards best practice for public housing asset management*, AHURI Positioning Paper No. 118, Australian Housing and Urban Research Institute, May 2009, p. 1.

⁶⁸ K. Arthurson, Redevelopment of public housing estates: The Australian experience in *Urban Policy and Research*, Vol. 16, 1998, pp. 35–46.

⁶⁹ Russell Kenley, et. al, *op. cit.*, fn 67, p. 3.

⁷⁰ J. Mawson, J. A. Church, P. Reid, B. Ashcroft, S. Dunlop, J. Love, D. Redmund and R. Walker, Policy Review Section in *Regional Studies*, Vol. 29, 1995, pp. 297–316.

⁷¹ R. M. Walker, How to Abolish Public Housing: Implications and Lessons from Public Management Reform, in *Housing Studies*, Vol. 16, 2001, pp. 675–696.

display a striking absence of adequate data and information systems necessary for effective performance monitoring.⁷² This was directly linked to the asset management system failure.

5.4 The Committee notes that the ACT Asset Management Strategy:

- does not include a comprehensive analysis of which stock cannot be sold or redeveloped due to heritage legislation;
- does not detail what will happen to current tenants during any redevelopment period;
- does not address what will happen if the land presented for sale does not sell at the expected price point, or if a sale fails to go ahead; and
- does not plan for future maintenance needs of stock that has been recently completed, or is currently being built.

5.5 AHURI emphasises that public housing administrative databases have the potential to be configured in a way that allows analysis of demand and supply factors, spatial variations, and public housing submarkets that can form the basis of policy and program decision-making.⁷³

5.6 Research compared private and public asset management practices and found that decision frameworks for property asset information are inadequate, under-managed and ineffective in public corporations compared to private property organisations.⁷⁴ These findings were largely based on the absence of life-cycle costing in public property management.

5.7 Life-cycle costing is used for a range of purposes including informing and encouraging public bodies, advising clients and policy makers, providing evidence to support business cases, comparing alternative investment options, detailed budgeting, purchasing decisions and monitoring of costs.⁷⁵

5.8 Research shows that organisations that have specialised staff to apply life-cycle costing to social housing stock experience significant advantages. Examples of efficiencies include being able to track the performance of individual

⁷² Russell Kenley, *et. al*, *op. cit.*, fn 67, p. 33.

⁷³ Terry Burke and Maryann Wulff, *Submarkets in public sector housing: an abstract concept or a decision-making tool?* AHURI Final Report No. 136, Australian Housing and Urban Research Institute, July 2009, p. 27.

⁷⁴ *Ibid*, p. 31.

⁷⁵ *Ibid*, p. 18.

properties and gain information on the operating costs and conditions of those projects. This leads to higher levels of performance with respect to the physical conditions of properties, occupancy status, and asset management. Secondly, the collection of operating cost data can assist managers of public housing to reform management practices and facilitate the re-calculation of operating subsidy formulas.⁷⁶

- 5.9 The Committee questions whether the data collection methodology of Housing ACT is extracting the right information in the most efficient way it can. It may be useful for Housing ACT to undertake a comprehensive data analysis of its stock based on AHURI research findings.

Maintenance of ACT social housing stock

- 5.10 The Housing ACT repairs and maintenance program for 2011-12 consisted of \$13 million for responsive repairs and \$21 million for planned maintenance. Included in the maintenance program was \$2.78 million on energy efficiency improvements.⁷⁷
- 5.11 The Committee acknowledges the work being done in regards to maintenance, but is concerned by the submissions made to the Inquiry that suggest the system is not keeping pace with demand, and is having a significant impact upon tenants. The Committee considers ongoing maintenance an essential component of an effective social housing program, particularly considering the average age of stock in the ACT. The Committee also emphasises that ongoing maintenance provision, for existing and newer properties needs to be a fundamental element of the asset management strategy through life cycle costing methods.
- 5.12 The Committee encourages Housing ACT to consider comparative schemes that have seen improvements in social housing maintenance schemes. For example, in 2003 NSW introduced the Maintenance Reform Program (MRP). The purpose of the program was to move asset management from a

⁷⁶ Russell Kenley, et. al, *op. cit.*, fn 67, p. 21.

⁷⁷ ACT Government, *Community Services Directorate Annual Report 2010-2011*, p. 113.

predominantly responsive model to planned and systematic maintenance.⁷⁸

This has generated the collection of useful planning data and received positive evaluations.

5.13 In Victoria, the Maintenance Call Centre was established to help manage the maintenance workload of housing services.⁷⁹ Having a central intake and work program made a significant difference to the waiting times and cost of maintenance.

5.14 An Auditor-General review of the Victorian public housing management system found gross failures with regard to maintenance programs and asset management practices. It found:

Asset management strategies need to detail expected life cycle costs and requirements such as cyclical upgrades of bathrooms and kitchens. It is not possible to determine from the current asset management strategy:

- the useful life of an asset, or what the division expects this to be
- projected time lines and costs of planned upgrades for each asset type,
- the costs and types of maintenance, whether for planned, responsive or preventive maintenance.

It is therefore unclear:

- whether planned decisions were implemented
- whether available resources were used effectively or efficiently
- how the portfolio is performing financially, such as the number of tenants housed as a proportion of total asset value
- whether the division is achieving good return on investment, given the timing and method of acquisition
- if there are opportunities for improvement.⁸⁰

5.15 The Committee is very concerned that a similar lack of information exists in the ACT, and that senior executives are making decisions with regard to the maintenance, management and range of ACT stock without the consideration that should be taking place.

⁷⁸ Russell Kenley, et. al, *op. cit.*, fn 67, p. 38.

⁷⁹ *Ibid*, p. 39.

⁸⁰ Des Pearson, *Audit: Access to Public Housing*, Victorian Auditor-General, 28 March 2012.

- 5.16 As identified in Victoria, this is particularly concerning given the financial pressures within the portfolio, the long lead times needed to create change and the importance of being able to account for the performance of this crucial public service.⁸¹

RECOMMENDATION 27

- 5.17 **The Committee recommends that the ACT Government consider the current asset management strategy an interim document, and immediately undertake activities to ensure that the information identified through best practice is collected and integrated into Housing ACT systems.**

RECOMMENDATION 28

- 5.18 **The Committee recommends that Housing ACT use the integrated system to develop a comprehensive maintenance and management strategy, and that this strategy be widely disseminated.**

Energy efficiency

- 5.19 The Committee understands that approximately 75 per cent of people who appear before ACAT because they cannot afford their energy bills are public housing tenants.⁸²
- 5.20 In 2007-08, the ACT Government committed \$20 million over 10 years to improve the energy efficiency of public housing. A 10-year action plan was implemented to deliver the energy efficiency program, centred on building fabric improvements and improving the energy efficiency of hot water systems and heating appliances.⁸³
- 5.21 Since the 2007-08 announcement, energy efficiency improvements have been undertaken to 3,100 properties. This represents about 26 per cent of the public housing portfolio.⁸⁴ The energy efficiency measures include, but are not

⁸¹Des Pearson, *op. cit.*, fn 80.

⁸²Amanda Bresnan MLA, *Minutes of Proceedings*, 17 November 2011.

⁸³ACT Government, *Community Services Directorate Annual Report 2010-2011*, p. 111.

⁸⁴*Ibid.*

limited to, ceiling and wall insulation, draft sealing, installation of gas and electric boosted solar hot water systems. In addition, energy efficient appliances such as 5 star gas hot water systems have been installed and from August 2010, pelmets and curtain rods are being installed in all free-standing houses as they become vacant. Approximately \$8.5 million has been expended on undertaking these measures to date.⁸⁵

- 5.22 In 2010-11, Housing ACT updated their Design Brief and inclusion list for all newly constructed properties. This change was intended to ensure all new properties were built to a minimum 6 star energy rating. The new Design Brief specifies 5 star gas or high-efficiency electric heaters for heating and 5 star instantaneous gas, gas boosted solar or high-efficiency electric storage hot water systems. To date, over 400 new properties have been built that achieve a minimum energy rating of 6 stars.⁸⁶
- 5.23 Housing ACT should include progress reports on its energy efficiency rollout measures within Annual Reports and link this to ACT Civil and Administrative Tribunal decisions. The Committee feels that the number of people who are taken to the Tribunal for failure to pay their electricity and gas bills in ACT Social Housing properties is a useful guide on the success of energy efficiency measures.

⁸⁵ ACT Government, *Community Services Directorate Annual Report 2010-2011*, p. 111.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*

6 CONCLUSION

- 6.1 The Committee acknowledges the innovative work that is being undertaken in respect of specific target groups, and the commitment of Housing ACT to expand properties numbers over the next three years.
- 6.2 Social housing properties are one of the Territory's highest valued assets and growth needs to be matched with vastly improved asset management practices, including the use of benchmarks for performance in respect of life-cycle costing measures.
- 6.3 The Committee is concerned at the level of service being provided to vulnerable applicants and tenants. The Committee strongly encourages Housing ACT to implement the ACT Ombudsman's report recommendations as a first step towards protecting the rights of tenants and ensuring that due process is followed for every person seeking social housing.

Steve Doszpot MLA

Chair

August 2012

APPENDIX A: Submissions

No	Author
1	Stepping Stones for Life
2	ACT Government
3	ACT Disability Advocacy Network
4	Women's Center for Health Matters
5	Mental Health Community Coalition ACT
6	Youth Coalition of the ACT
7	Companion House
8	Care Inc Financial Counselling Service and the Consumer Law Centre
9	Confidential submission
10	Welfare Rights and Legal Centre
11	ACT Ombudsman
12	ACT Shelter
13	ACT Human Rights Commission
14	Carers ACT
15	ACTCOSS
16	Safe Shelter in Canberra

The Committee also received four supplementary submissions from Minister Burch, ACT Disability Advocacy Network and the Welfare Rights and Legal Centre.

APPENDIX B: Public hearings

Wednesday 14 December 2011

- Mr Keith Baker, Chair, Stepping Stones for Life
- Ms Genevieve Bolton, Coordinator/Principal Solicitor, Welfare Rights and Legal Centre
- Ms Joy Burch, Minister for Community Services
- Ms Helen Dalley, Senior Solicitor, Welfare Rights and Legal Centre
- Mr Martin Hehir, Director-General, Community Services Directorate
- Ms Maureen Sheehan, Executive Director, Housing and Community Services
- Ms Sarah Spiller, Policy Coordinator, ACT Shelter
- Ms Leigh Watson, Executive Officer, ACT Shelter
- Ms Anne Yuille, Advisor/Coordinator, Welfare Rights and Legal Centre

Wednesday 21 December 2011

- Ms Carmel Franklin, Director, Care Inc. Financial Counselling Service
- Mr Michael Hardy, Senior Investigation Officer, ACT Ombudsman's office
- Ms Fiona May, Chief Executive Officer, ACT Disability, Aged and Carer Advocacy Service
- Ms Lease Mayes, Housing Financial Counsellor, Care Inc. Financial Counselling Service and the Consumer Law Centre of the ACT
- Ms Brianna McGill, Senior Children and Young People Adviser, Human Rights Commission
- Ms Brooke McKail, Executive Officer, Mental Health Community Coalition
- Ms Diane Merryfull, Senior Assistant Ombudsman, ACT Ombudsman's Office
- Mr Simon Viereck, Policy and Sector Development Manager, Mental Health Community Coalition
- Dr Helen Watchirs, Human Rights and Discrimination Commissioner, Human Rights Commission