

Mr Patrick O'Brien
 The Secretary
 Legal and Social Issues Committee
 Parliament House, Spring Street
 EAST MELBOURNE VIC 3002

Dear Mr O'Brien

Submission to the Standing Committee on Legal and Social Issues Inquiry into the Public Housing Renewal Program

The Housing and Homelessness Network – Boroondara and Manningham was established in early February 2015 by Access Health and Community. We are made up of workers who are involved in direct service and/or program delivery in the Local Government Areas of Boroondara and Manningham, within the housing and homeless sector and have consumer representation from Council to Homeless Persons 'Peer Education Support Program'.

Current membership includes staff members from the following agencies:

Access Health and Community, Camcare, Department of Human Services - Centrelink, City of Boroondara, Council to Homeless Persons – Peer Education Support Program member, Eastern Community Legal Centre, Haven Home Safe, JobCo, Kew Uniting Church - Boroondara Community Outreach, Manningham City Council, Neami National, Bolton Clarke formerly Royal District Nursing Service Homeless Persons Program, Salvation Army, SalvoCare Eastern, Servants Community Housing, Swinburne University, UnitingCare Harrison, Victoria Police and YMCA Community Recreation Outreach Program.

We understand that the following member agencies: Camcare, City of Boroondara and Council to Homeless Persons are also making submissions in regards to this inquiry. Please refer to the submissions of these respective agencies for their position.

As a network we would like to thank the Standing Committee on Legal and Social Issues for the opportunity to make a submission to the Inquiry into the Public Housing Renewal Program (PHRP).

We make the following comments against the Terms of Reference of the inquiry:

1. The adequacy of a proposed 10% increase in public housing (or 1,100 public units) on the sites given the size of the waiting list for public housing;

We feel the proposed 10% increase or 1,100 public units in public housing is hugely inadequate. It will not reduce the current long waiting list for public housing in Victoria, which currently stands at 35,392 social housing applicants on the Victorian Housing Register and an additional 6,770 waiting to transfer. We would like to see more units than the proposed 10%. This needs to reflect the waiting list by accommodating more people to more houses. If properties are going to be demolished then these need to be replaced plus an increase in housing more people.

A vital housing option for those who are homeless is social housing. Within Victoria the number one reason for entering homelessness is people escaping family violence. Across the state, more people are struggling to rent privately especially those on low incomes. We need to increase the stock of social housing units in Victoria with an additional 1,700 each year over the next 20 years. This is an increase of 30,000 social housing homes. To add to this, the number of bedrooms included in each

estate, needs to increase as well to reflect families who are needing to be housed. The longer someone stays homeless the more damage it creates and the harder it is to house them.

In Victoria there is a significant shortage of social housing. Only 3.47 per cent of housing is directed to social housing. This is below the current national average of 4.5 per cent. Within both local government areas of Boroondara and Manningham, we have below average rates of social housing. Our areas are well serviced, close to public transport, contain many schools and offer a variety of other services. We would like to see significantly more units allocated to public housing within the municipalities we represent.

We are concerned about the funding model of public housing within Victoria. It is not clear how it will work. If the sale of public land is for private gain, then any profit derived from redevelopments needs to be placed in to building more public housing within those local government areas. There needs to be more transparency and consultation on this matter within Victoria.

- 1.1 Recommendation:** Public housing unit's part of the PHRP needs to be significantly more than 10 per cent.
- 1.2 Recommendation:** The current number of public housing units on the sites, at a minimum needs to double.
- 1.3 Recommendation:** When increasing the number of public housing units at each estate, the number of bedrooms needs to increase as well.
- 1.4 Recommendation:** More social housing units needs to be allocated to Boroondara and Manningham.
- 1.5 Recommendation:** Any profit derived from redevelopment of public housing land, should be invested in that municipality to replace and grow the amount of public housing.
- 1.6 Recommendation:** Transparency and consultation is needed on the sale of public housing land within Victoria.
- 1.7 Recommendation:** A breakdown of the number of applicants on the waiting list for social housing in local government areas needs to occur.

2. The ability to cater for all demographics including families, couples and singles with the proposed housing mix;

A diversity of housing types, demographics and cultural mix is ideal for proposed public housing as long as it is reflective of the waiting list. We do not preference high rises. Instead there needs to be a variety of housing types offered to people on the waiting list. Housing that blends in with the rest of the local properties ensures that public housing does not stand out and can't be easily identified. This is important to create a sense of community among public housing tenants and the rest of the community. We also believe that places do not need to be labelled 'public housing' as this will further single out these tenants within the rest of the community. By mixing family demographics and cultures up within public housing estates, a true representation of the community is being met.

Catering for all demographics is required and this needs to be reflected in a variety of bedrooms being offered. We are concerned that there is limited stock for single people under the age of 55. As a result there is a high need for one and two bedroom units. Consideration is also necessary in offering more than two bedrooms for families or single parents. This is due to the fact that the majority of people entering homelessness is as a result of family violence.

Redevelopments and future housing estates should be accessible for people with limited mobility, disabilities and older adults. As our population is ageing, housing needs to be reflective of this and accommodate for older adults. People with a disability also need specially designed types of housing. These population groups need to be taken into consideration when planning for the future of housing, whether it is public or private.

- 2.1 Recommendation:** A diversity of housing types, demographics and cultural mix is ideal as long as it is reflective of the waiting list.
- 2.2 Recommendation:** Catering for all demographics is required and this needs to be reflected in a variety of bedrooms being offered.
- 2.3 Recommendation:** Future planning of housing, whether it is public or private properties should be accessible for people with limited mobility, disabilities and older adults.

3. The effects on current public housing tenants including:

- a. Whether they will be moved to accommodation that is secure, stable and fit for purpose**
- b. Whether they will be moved to accommodation that is close to existing social support networks, educational, health and welfare services**
- c. Whether current tenants will be able to return to the estates;**

We affirm points a, b and c. Agreeing that public housing tenants should be moved to secure, stable and fit for purpose places, that it will be close to existing social support networks, educational, health and welfare services and that they will be offered the choice to return to the estates they originally lived at prior to redevelopment.

When planning redevelopment, ample time should be allocated to consulting with the tenants. This can be a stressful time for the tenant and careful consideration when planning needs to occur to ensure a smooth transition. We believe support services should be involved and tenant groups formed. This way tenants voices are heard and the appropriate support is made available.

- 3.1 Recommendation:** Continuous consultation needs to occur with tenants throughout the stages of redevelopment of public housing estates along with the involvement of support services and the formation of tenant groups.

4. The allocation of parts of the sites between the proposed new public and private housing units;

Housing needs to be integrated for real social mix. The design of new housing is important as private and public housing units need to look the same and blend in with the rest of the suburb. We also believe that people don't need to know that there is public housing present on a site, as the privacy of the tenants needs to be respected.

Haven Home Safe have a tenant reference group for their sites that they manage. This group is about independent living and building the capacity of the tenants. We believe this is a good model and could be incorporated going forward. We propose our support for a 'salt and pepper' mixed tenure approach for all future housing developments as part of the PHRP.

All developments should include the availability of community spaces – internal and external for the delivery of activities and services for tenants. This will give the opportunity for tenants to be linked

in with appropriate services. It will also give them the opportunity to interact with other tenants socially or even a place to meet and greet others. Community spaces are the heart of estates.

4.1 Recommendation: Public and private housing needs to be integrated for real social mix to create an inclusive community.

4.2 Recommendation: A tenant reference group for different sites should be established to ensure a voice is given to the lived community on the estates.

4.3 Recommendation: All developments should incorporate a mixed tenure approach of ‘salt and pepper’.

4.4 Recommendation: All developments should include the availability of community spaces – internal and external for the delivery of activities and services for tenants.

5. The lack of public condition assessments of the estates or alternative options such as refurbishment of all or part of the existing hours;

The network has nothing to comment.

6. The proposed significant increase in density and heights and any local environmental impact, such as loss of open space and mature vegetation;

We believe that issues of shading and high wind are concerns for high rise apartments and this needs to be taken into consideration when planning.

7. The removal of planning controls from local councils, and planning implementations surrounding communities including, existing neighbourhood character, traffic flow and provisions of services;

The network has nothing to comment.

8. The proposed loss of third party appeal rights;

The network has nothing to comment.

9. The transparency and genuine community consultation with affected residents, neighbouring communities and the broader Victorian community regarding the short, medium and long term implications of the PHRP model as currently proposed;

We believe that there was not genuine consultation with residents at the Markham Avenue, estate in Ashburton.

9.1 Recommendation: Genuine and transparent consultation should be committed to from the Victorian Government when redevelopments occur within all parties of a local community.

10. Public housing estates where similar models are envisaged or underway, including

a. Markham Avenue, Ashburton

b. Koolkuna Lane, Hampton; and

c. the corner of Stokes Street and Penola Street, Preston;

The network has nothing to comment.

11. Previous Victorian public housing renewal projects, including but not limited to the Kensington, Carlton and Prahran public housing estates;

The network has nothing to comment.

12. Best practice models for the provision of public housing from within Australia and overseas;

We believe that the Housing First model in Finland is a best practice model for the provision of public housing that Victoria can learn from.

Finland invested into a Housing First model which included buying flats from the private market, converting shelters and dormitory-type hostels into supported housing to be used as rental apartments for homeless or low income people. There was a disappearance of temporary solutions to homelessness and instead a focus was on permanent accommodation. This means an independent rental flat with own rental contract. A mixed economy of accommodation types is essential to ending homelessness. The Housing First model provides a stable home and individually tailored support to end homelessness. Finland is the only country in Europe where rates of homelessness has decreased.

In closing, as a network we like to thank the Legal and Social Issues Committee for giving us the opportunity to make a submission into this inquiry. We know that tenants within public housing are some of the most disadvantaged and disconnected people within Victoria.

Please contact **Angela Vidic** for further information on this submission:

Angela Vidic

Health Promotion Practitioner

Access Health and Community

Ph. [REDACTED]

Email: [REDACTED]

Yours faithfully

David Towl

(on behalf of the Housing and Homelessness Network – Boroondara and Manningham)

General Manager, Health Promotion

Access Health and Community