

## **Sustaining Tenancies**

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Increasingly public housing accommodates people with histories of homelessness and/or complex needs, while community housing in particular in Victoria has been very targeted to groups with specific needs, such as those with a disability or people who are single and have often been homeless.

Tenants from these groups are often unemployed, socially isolated, have few personal resources and often require assistance to sustain tenancies. Without assistance, they are likely within eighteen months of entering long term housing to be facing eviction and a return to other more costly accommodation options, such as the homelessness service system, correctional facilities or hospitals.

Investing in sustaining tenancies not only makes good business sense in improving rent revenue and reducing costs arising from damage but it also recognises that housing provides a base for tenants to participate in community life and employment. As such, investment in sustaining tenancies contributes to health and well-being for not only the tenant but also the local community and the housing provider.

Over the past five years, the challenge of developing a housing system which provides a continuum of assistance across homelessness assistance and long term social housing, leading to sustained tenancies in long term housing that breaks the cycle of homelessness has been a work in progress in Victoria. This presentation will review the successes and failures of the actions taken to date to improve housing outcomes in Victoria, as well as identifying the next steps that will be taken in implementing new approaches to establish successful long term tenancies as well as comprehensive early intervention strategies, when tenancies start to fail.

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# Sustaining Tenancies

## PART A: SUSTAINING TENANCIES IN VICTORIA'S PUBLIC HOUSING

### 1. Introduction

The purpose of this paper is to outline the successes and failures of the actions taken to date to improve housing outcomes in Victoria. It will identify challenges from the next steps that will be taken in implementing new approaches to establish successful long term tenancies, as well as comprehensive early intervention strategies, when tenancies start to fail.

Sustaining tenancies has been defined as all possible and reasonable actions by a housing authority to support tenants in order to prevent the risk of eviction. Therefore, in a narrow sense, sustaining tenancies has been defined as eviction prevention<sup>1</sup> (rather than avoidance).

The challenges that public housing now faces in sustaining tenancies has its origins thirty years ago in the emergence of significant levels of homelessness in Australia, at a time of dramatic increases in the level and duration of unemployment, in parallel with the process of deinstitutionalisation gaining momentum.

As a consequence, in an ever rising property market, while once public housing in Australia had an agenda of providing affordable housing for the working poor in locations linked to industry, increasingly public housing is becoming the housing of last resort for people who lack other affordable housing options and who also have a complexity of other needs that reduces their attractiveness as tenants to private landlords and even to community housing providers.

With as many as 20% of current tenants having entered public housing through a segmented waiting list that prioritises higher level needs, the requirement for intensive tenancy management in order to sustain tenancies, and for those with the most complex issues, more formal support and continuing care, has become critical.

Victoria has been developing its social housing system service delivery model to address these needs to better sustain tenancies.

### 2. The Imperative to Address Changing Needs

It is broadly accepted that the role of the Office of Housing (OoH) in Victoria, which is part of the Department of Human Services, extends beyond the provision and management of housing to effecting positive social impacts (such as sustaining tenancies and communities)<sup>2</sup>.

As a social housing provider, a key consideration is attempting to keep people housed rather than contributing to a 'revolving door' where tenants cycle through periods of social housing and homelessness<sup>3</sup>. This involves assisting tenants to understand and meet lease obligations under the Residential Tenancies Act to avoid, where possible, issues resulting in breaches. It also involves working collaboratively with other agencies to improve the support services infrastructure to reduce disadvantage that can impact on capacity to sustain tenancies.

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<sup>1</sup> Jones, A., et al, *Sustaining Tenancies In Public Housing: Understanding And Supporting Tenancies At Risk*, University of Queensland, 2003, p.1

<sup>2</sup> Ling, S., *Sustaining Public and Social Housing Tenancies*, unpublished paper, Housing Services Branch, Housing & Community Building Victoria, November 2004, p.2

<sup>3</sup> Gale, A., *Successful Tenancies – Stopping the Revolving Door*, National Housing Conference, April 2003, p.6

Ultimately, there are two main drivers for better addressing these needs. These are the *economic imperative* and the *people imperative*.

For a public housing system operating in an environment of declining Commonwealth funding and rising costs, sustaining tenancies makes good business sense in that it:

- Improves rent revenue.
- Reduces costs through vacancies and damage.
- Reduces staffing costs, as tenancy turnover is a primary driver of staff workload.
- Reduces the cost of accommodation relative to housing people in the higher cost homelessness system, or the even higher cost health or correctional systems.

Sustaining tenancies is also vital in terms of housing outcomes for individual tenants and local communities, in that it:

- Prevents homelessness.
- Consolidates outcomes achieved by homelessness and other support providers.
- Provides a base for community participation, employment and contributes to health and well-being.
- Improves housing experience for the community, the tenant and the housing provider.

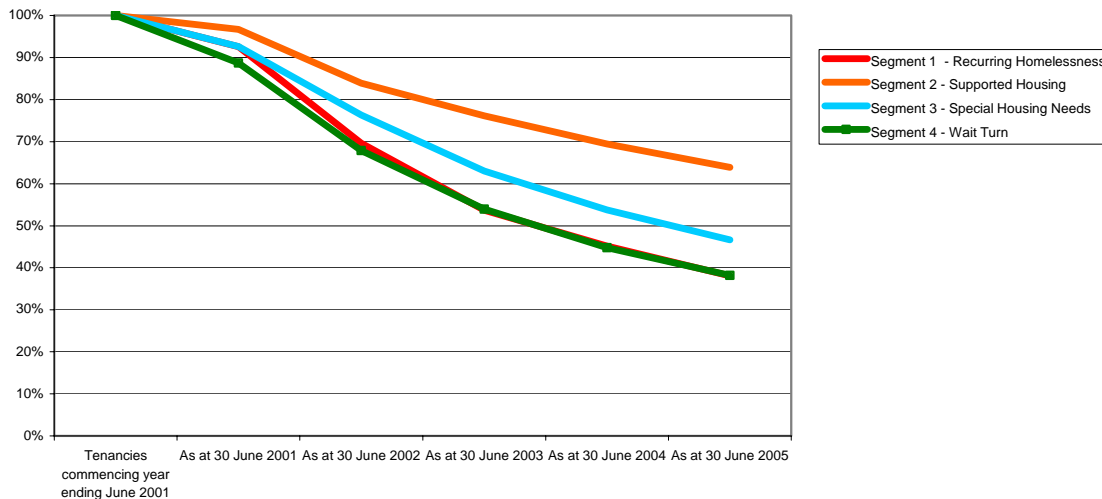
### **3. How Well Are Tenancies Currently Being Maintained?**

In 1999 through the implementation of the Segmented Waiting List, arrangements for access to public housing in Victoria were structured on the basis that those whose need for housing was most urgent would be offered housing before other applicants on the waiting list irrespective of the order in which applications were received. These 'Early Housing' categories in order of priority are:

1. *Recurring Homelessness* – People who have a history of being homeless or who are at risk of long-term homelessness.
2. *Supported Housing* – People living in unsuitable housing who have high support needs or need major disability modifications made to their home.
3. *Special Needs Housing*– People whose current housing is unsuitable for a variety of personal, health or family reasons.

At a basic level, an indicator of tenancy sustainability is duration of tenancy. Figure 1 shows the duration of tenancy by allocation segment for all tenancies that commenced in 2000.

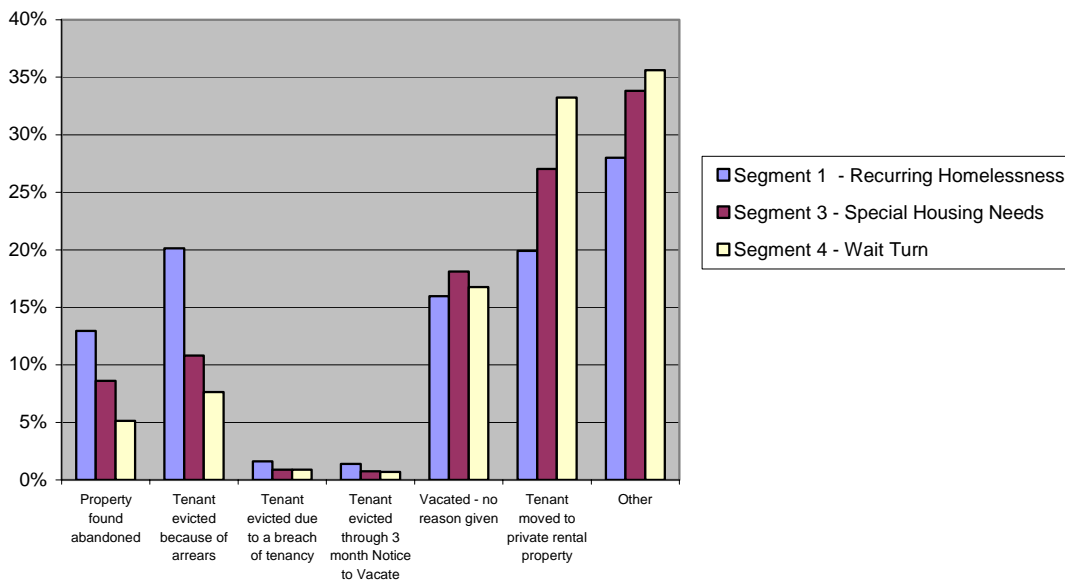
Tenancies comenced 2000/01 and continuing as at June 2001 to June 2005



As the Figure 1 shows, tenancies are more commonly maintained by those entering public housing through the Supported Housing segment (Segment 2), the group of tenants most likely to have access to support or related assistance. Tenancies are least likely to be maintained for those who enter through the recurring homelessness segment, the group of tenants who are least likely to have alternative housing options, and for tenants who enter through wait-turn, who are most likely to have alternative housing options to which they can move.

While the rate of housing exit is comparable between those entering through the Recurring Homelessness (Segment 1) and Wait-Turn (Segment 4) segments, Figure 2 indicates the reasons for leaving vary considerably between these two tenant groups.

Figure 2 - Reason for Vacating for Tenancies that commenced 2000/01



Exits from public housing can be positive or negative depending on the likely impact on the tenant or household and the reason for moving. A housing exit could be considered positive where the tenant has moved into private rental accommodation to take up employment, or as a result of improved financial circumstances. Exits resulting in property abandonment, or from eviction, suggest a negative housing outcome.

The data in Figure 2 indicates a higher level of negative housing exits for Segment 1 tenants with higher numbers having left the property without notice, or evicted due to rent arrears or similar matters. By contrast, this was the case for only around 15% of Segment 4 tenants. Further, only 20% of Segment 1 tenants exited into private rental in comparison with 33% of Segment 4 tenants. This latter housing trend reinforces the increased housing options among tenants entering through the Wait Turn Segment.

It is expected that as service interventions become more effective at providing for the holistic needs of tenants, a reduction in negative housing exits among vulnerable tenants will be evident and therefore the data presented in both Figures 1 and 2 will provide a baseline from which to measure success in this area.

These housing exit trends indicate the need to prioritise assistance to Early Housing tenants who lack alternative and sustainable housing options in the private rental market, and often enter public housing with significant support needs.

Ultimately, a loss of Segment 1 tenants may increase demand for homelessness services. Negative housing exits among Segment 3 tenants are also likely to have an impact on demand for homelessness assistance due to the limited private rental housing options for persons requiring property modifications, and the periods of homelessness that many have previously experienced. Supporting this view is the finding that in 2003/04 796 households receiving either SAAP/CAP accommodation or an active referral for SAAP/CAP accommodation had previously been accommodated in public housing.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Unpublished analysis of 2003-2004 National Data Collection Agency data undertaken by Department of Human Services.

## **PART B: VICTORIA'S APPROACH FROM 1997 TO THE PRESENT**

### **4. The Transitional Housing Management Program**

In 1997, the Transitional Housing Management (THM) Program was introduced in Victoria in recognition of the increasing demand for homelessness services and the need for a better front end response to housing assistance for people experiencing (or at risk of) housing crisis.

The broad aim of the THM program is to provide housing assistance to individuals and families in crisis as a result of homelessness or impending homelessness to assist them in establishing and/or maintain appropriate, secure and sustainable housing through the provision of transitional housing, information and referral services, and support where required.

Over the period since 1997, THM has grown from 1035 to more than 3500 properties and also provides assistance through 100 Housing Information and Referral workers.

As such, the THM program operates as a clearinghouse, enabling people's capacity to sustain ongoing housing to be assessed and developed.

### **5. Rental Housing Support Program/Public Housing Advocacy Program**

The Rental Housing Support Program (RHSP) was also introduced in 1997 to: provide independent advice, support and referral for public housing tenants and applicants; manage community facilities, including community gardens; promote the use of community facilities for activities which are valued by the tenant community; and provide advice on regional needs.

The Public Housing Advocacy Program (PHAP) was introduced in 2000 to improve the availability of advocacy for public housing tenants, replacing the RHSP. Additional funding rolled out at that time strengthened management infrastructure for these community-based services.

### **6. Victorian Homelessness Strategy**

The State Government commissioned the Victorian Homelessness Strategy (VHS) in July 2000, to provide a blueprint for more effectively responding to homelessness. At the same time, management of the Supported Accommodation Assistance Program (SAAP) moved into the Housing and Community Building Division of the Department of Human Services.

The VHS is characterised by collaboration, evidence gathering and change. It has been built on extensive consultation with key stakeholders, in particular those who have used the homelessness service system.

The Strategy provides a whole-of-Government approach to effectively tackle homelessness, with a strong emphasis on prevention and early intervention strategies.<sup>5</sup> The VHS is now in its fifth year of implementation.

In the period since 2000 the State Government has invested heavily in SAAP to expand service system capacity. Whereas in 2000 the State provided 42% of SAAP funds, this has risen to 51% in 2005.

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<sup>5</sup> Newman, T., *The Strategic Thrust Of The Victorian Homelessness Strategy*, National Homelessness Conference, 2003, p.2

At the same time, the emphasis in the VHS has been very much on testing new ways of responding to homelessness through a range of projects including: targeting high risk groups; reconfiguring access to the service system; developing cross-government initiatives; and improving flows through the service system into long term housing. The implications of this work are considered later in this paper.

## 7. Neighbourhood Renewal

Neighbourhood Renewal was implemented in Victoria in 2001 to address the needs of disadvantaged neighbourhoods in Victoria. Neighbourhood Renewal is led by DHS as part of the State Government's Growing Victoria Together agenda to build more cohesive communities and reduce inequalities.

Neighbourhood Renewal empowers local communities to shape their own futures and enable Government and agencies to connect with and provide services to communities in a new way in order to create vibrant places where people want to live, Neighbourhood Renewal therefore seeks to:

- Increase people's pride and participation in the community.
- Lift employment, training and education opportunities and expand local economies.
- Improve personal safety and reduce crime.
- Enhance housing and the physical environment.
- Promote health and wellbeing.
- Increase access to transport and other key services and improve government responsiveness.

## 8. Housing Office Review

The Housing Office Review (HOR) commenced in 2001 in response to the changing nature of public housing in Victoria and the need to address systemic workforce issues in light of perceived high attrition rates and the need to examine the effectiveness of the Housing Services Officer (HSO) role.

The HOR was established to recommend improvements to the job roles and organisational arrangements within housing teams, in the context of increasingly complex demands for housing assistance, declining Commonwealth funding for housing, and the need for more integrated approaches to sustaining tenancies.

The aim of the HOR was to: provide a consistent service delivery model across the state by changing team structures, job roles and resource allocation; to better equip the OoH to deliver its commitment to sustainable tenancies; and to establish a more integrated service that better meets customer needs. The HOR recognised the need to integrate activity with a range of parallel strategies being pursued across DHS, which underpin the directions of earlier intervention, better assessment and improved linkages with other support providers<sup>6</sup>.

Since the inception of the HOR, a range of initiatives have been implemented to improve regional capacity to deliver and provide quality housing services. These initiatives comprise:

(a) *Introduction Of More Intensive Client Home Visits* -The Client Home Visit Scheme has been implemented as a means of delivering improved client service, support and tenancy management through an increased focus on visiting clients in their homes.

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<sup>6</sup>Office of Housing, *Housing Office Review Final Report*, Department of Human Services, 2005. p6

As part of this scheme, HSOs will visit all new tenancies within the first six weeks of tenancy to ensure those at risk of tenancy failure are given support at the earliest opportunity. In addition staff will be visiting all other tenants once every two years, providing housing staff and tenants with the chance to: establish a better working relationship; give tenants a better understanding of their rights and responsibilities; and foster a more proactive approach to solving problems by local Housing Offices.

(b) *Housing Support Coordinator* - To assist in sustaining tenancies Housing Support Coordinators (HSC) were established to assist HSOs to identify and respond appropriately to clients who may have support needs, by providing advice and support to housing staff, and by developing links between housing staff and the broader human services sector.

Flinders Institute of Public Policy and Management conducted an external evaluation of the HSC positions to contribute to the development of a longer-term model. The evaluation confirmed the value of the increased activity directed at sustaining and building successful tenancies within offices. This included examples of tenancies which had been progressing towards eviction, but which were continuing as a result of direct or indirect intervention by the HSCs.

In 2005, the OoH successfully negotiated a new Housing Career Structure for housing staff, which provided for 56 existing HSOs to be regraded to a new category of HSO3, to manage complex tenancies and applications, and to support less experienced staff. The new Housing Career Structure and the HOR clarified the role of the HSC & HSO3, defines the reporting arrangements, and provide support and greater capacity for the HSO to better manage and sustain tenancies.

(c) *Maintenance Call Centre*- A Maintenance Call Centre was established in 2002 to better respond to clients requests for maintenance and to free up housing staff from the bulk of the transactional workload associated with responsive maintenance in order to allow them to concentrate on regular and earlier home visiting, and sustaining tenancies.

(d) *Rent Deduction Service Initiatives* - Since March 2003, sign up to a rent deduction services has been a condition of tenancy for all new tenants and transferring tenants with a poor payment history. Changes to rental arrears policy also introduced the option for tenants to sign a second local agreement provided the rent and arrears payments were made via RDS.

## **PART C: WHAT WE HAVE LEARNT TO DATE**

### **9. The Review of the Public Housing Advocacy Program**

In 2004/05 PHAP provided funding of \$4.7 M to sixteen regional and statewide advocacy and specialist services assisting 18,000 public housing applicants and tenants each year. While PHAP did not have an overt agenda of sustaining tenancies, it certainly had this as an implicit agenda.

A review of PHAP was undertaken by consultants Thomson and Goodall in 2004, and overseen by a steering committee comprising housing staff, regional housing management, PHAP providers and tenant representatives.

The review found:

- PHAP service delivery was not well integrated at a regional and local level.
- Service quality was variable and the range of services provided was inconsistent.
- The capacity of the program (assistance to 18,000 households or 15% of all those housed and on the waiting list) was excessive for an advocacy program.
- There was duplication between PHAP and the Victorian Homelessness Strategy (VHS) 'Tenants at Risk' pilot that was also being reviewed by Thomson and Goodall.

### **10. What the Reviews of the VHS Initiatives Found**

Since 2000 the Government has achieved significant expansion and reform of the Victorian homelessness service system through the Victorian Homelessness Strategy (VHS). The strategy introduces new approaches to improve the State's response to homelessness, including collaborations targeting groups at risk of homelessness such as ex-prisoners, young people leaving Juvenile Justice centres, people with mental illness and people with significant drug abuse issues.

There are consistent high level learnings across all of this work which fundamentally challenge the way current program arrangements and service models are designed to respond to homelessness.

For example, the success of these initiatives is dependant upon capacity of government and funded sector agencies to effectively partner, work holistically with a client across housing, support, health, justice and employment, education and training sectors, as well as see service as a continuum of tailored assistance.

This challenges policy makers to rethink their service model, platforms and tools to provide quality assistance, and challenges providers to develop strengthened relationships that better link service provision for clients.

### **11. What the VHS Tenancies At Risk Pilots Told Us**

The VHS Tenancies at Risk Pilot was one of these VHS projects. The aim of the pilot was to reduce the risk of homelessness among public housing tenants by adopting an early intervention approach. The Pilot was specifically intended to support public tenants who are at risk of being evicted, and to link them into appropriate services or supports in order to maintain their tenancy. Of particular concern are public housing tenancies that are likely to fail as a result of rental arrears, anti-social behaviour, or a deterioration in a tenant's health and ability to live independently without support.

The pilot commenced in 2003 and its evaluation was completed in 2005. A different approach was trialled in each pilot. Pilots were undertaken in north eastern Victoria, Melbourne's western suburbs and in Geelong.

The needs of tenants assisted by the pilot all involved multiple issues that were placing their housing at risk. Money management and finances (present in 78% of cases), exposure to violence (in 54% of cases), Alcohol and drug issues (in 41% of cases) and mental health issues (in 34% of cases) were amongst the most prevalent issues.

The evaluation concluded that a:

*...significant minority of public housing tenants assisted by the Pilot agencies were experiencing a high level and complexity of need, which likely contributed to their tenancy risk. Pilot agencies required appropriate strengths in assessment of client's needs, engagement, case management and referral to and advocacy with external agencies.*<sup>7</sup>

Significantly, the evaluation found that:

*The Pilot worked at two levels - to stabilise the tenancy in the short to medium term; and to put in place arrangements (involving other agencies and community supports) to assist in sustaining the tenancy in the longer term.*<sup>8</sup>

## **12. What the Merri Housing SAAP Research Project Told Us**

At the same time that the PHAP and VHS evaluations were underway, Merri Outreach Services in Melbourne's northern suburbs undertook a project funded through the National Supported Accommodation Assistance Program (SAAP) research fund to identify the factors impact on people's capacity to maintain long-term tenancies and whether the SAAP assistance had helped them.

In regard to sustaining tenancies, the project findings included:

- In order to reduce rates of eviction preventative strategies were required that focused on early intervention.
- Interventions should be targeted to vulnerable households with a risk profile.
- Access to informal support (family, friends etc) and formal support were key factors.
- Housing needs cannot be addressed in isolation.

In regard to the role played by SAAP services and the homelessness service system more broadly, the project found that it:

*...plays a crucial part in the process, not only from the point of entry to the service, that is the housing crisis, but also in the way in which the agency and its workers extend their support beyond both the time of the crisis and the most obvious requirements of the funding and service agreement. In addition it is clear that the security of tenure and especially the related quality of life further depend on both informal and formal sources of support.*

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<sup>7</sup> Thomson Goodall Associates Pty. Ltd., *Review of the At Risk Tenancies Pilot* (Unpublished), July 2005, p38

<sup>8</sup> *ibid.*

*With so many interrelated issues to contend with, it would seem that the core challenge arising for Supported Accommodation Assistance Program (SAAP) services and Transitional Housing Management (THM) services, the main providers of housing assistance to people who experience homelessness in Victoria, is understanding and acting upon the connection between housing with the need for support. Consequently, what appears fundamental is the need to incorporate a holistic approach rather than a unilateral one.*<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Healy, B., et al, *What factors impact on people's capacity to maintain long-term tenancies? Did the SAAP experience help them?* Merri Outreach Support Service & La Trobe University School of Social Work and Social Policy, 2005, pp18-22.

## **PART D: WHERE ARE WE HEADING - FOUR STRATEGIES**

Given these findings, Victoria's approach to sustaining tenancies is now entering a new phase focused on much stronger integration and collaboration between the various components that have been developed to sustain tenancies.

This integrated approach to sustaining tenancies has four key aspects:

1. Optimising the effectiveness of the homelessness service system.
2. Implementing a more responsive public housing service delivery model.
3. Providing intensive tenancy management to establish high risk tenancies as well as intervene when tenancies are failing.
4. Developing a stronger interface with and access to assistance from the mainstream social and health systems.

### **13. Effective Homelessness System**

Given Victoria's high level of investment in transitional housing and related assistance, it is essential the outcomes the homelessness system can achieve in resolving crisis and stabilising people's lives are optimised. The VHS projects demonstrate this requires not just housing but also other needs such as employment, education and training, health and family reconciliation in order to sustain long term housing.

Over the next two years, the lessons drawn from the various VHS pilots and joined up initiatives, together with the changes arising from other current initiatives such as 'front door' projects, which aim to streamline access and implement common assessment, will be progressively rolled out across the homelessness system.

The intent will be to develop a system that optimises its capacity to intervene at the earliest point to prevent or resolve homelessness, while at the same time having the capacity to address the needs of people who are homeless and have complex needs.

It is likely that this will entail: better initial assessment and more intensive crisis intervention at earliest point of entry into the homelessness service system; a sustained period of stabilised accommodation to consolidate successive gains; and then intensive assistance at the point of the moving out of the homelessness system.

A greater capacity to work holistically and engage a range of other providers through a case co-ordination and referral approach will be vital.

Equally critical will be the development of closer working relationships between THMs and local Housing Offices to better manage entry into public housing. SAAP providers are likely to take a more formalised role in case managing the staged establishment of a successful public housing tenancy for those with complex needs.

### **14. Responsive Public Housing Service Delivery Model**

Implementation of a new client based service delivery model comprising three specialised teams commenced in May 2005. This model recognises the different kinds of expertise required to undertake assessment and deliver housing advice and assistance; tenancy and property management; and specialised support.

Underpinning the new service delivery model is the need for staff to have a thorough knowledge of support services and the full suite of housing options for all clients (applicants and tenants) and how these services can be best accessed. This will include developing and maintaining relationships with other DHS program areas and external housing and support providers.

The Service Delivery Model comprises:

*(a) Housing Advice And Assistance Team (HAAT)*

The 'new' and 'expanded' functions reflect the change in focus for this team, from undertaking transactional tasks of assessing applications for housing and bond, to a team that will provide comprehensive up to date information to prospective clients on the range of services provided by both directly and by other government and non-government agencies in the housing and support sector.

HAAT staff will be expected to individually assess each client's needs, and respond appropriately to clients at risk. It is an expectation that clients will have the opportunity to actively determine the housing pathway that is most suitable to both their immediate and long term housing need.

Where services cannot be provided directly, the HAAT Services Officer will be required to make a referral to an agency or organisation that will be able to assist the client.

*(b) Tenancy and Property Team (TPT)*

In addition to managing tenancy accounts and properties (assessing rebates, monitoring rental payments, undertaking property inspections), the TPT team will work with tenants, and the tenant community, to establish and maintain successful tenancies.

HSOs will be expected to respond to the changing needs of tenants, proactively assisting households at risk to maintain their tenancy. Where services cannot be provided directly, the HSO will be required to make a referral to an agency or organisation that will be able to assist the household.

*(c) Support Links Team (SLT)*

This team provides critical administrative and specialist support at the regional level to the service delivery teams. This will involve performance monitoring; undertaking projects designed to respond to local priorities; improved planning, as well as resourcing tenant participation and related activities.

## **15. Supporting Staff to Implement the Housing Office Review**

A substantial training program to support implementation of the new service delivery model has been developed. The HOR model promotes better business practices and structures, which support the creation of a skilled and knowledgeable workforce. It focuses change around approaches to enhanced client service, developing a learning culture and professionalising the housing workforce.

The OoH is committed to the implementation of the Community Services Training Package. This training package contains competencies and standards that best reflect the HSOs' competencies and job functions.

The OoH will be working to introduce a mandatory qualification as a pre-entry requirement for all new staff. A Recognition Service has been established providing existing staff an opportunity to

participate in a formal process to assess their skills and knowledge and receive recognition for units from the national qualification.

## **16. Intensive Tenancy Management Capacity**

Consistent with the recommendation of the PHAP Review report referred to earlier, in 2006 PHAP will be reconstituted as the Social Housing Advocacy and Support Program (SHASP).

SHASP will be a regionally based program focused on achieving improved housing outcomes that: reduces entry from public housing into the homelessness service system; improves exits from the homelessness system; and reduces arrears.

Key features of the new response will include:

- SHASP services will be area based and required to work in close partnership with local Housing Offices, other housing and support providers and with local government.
- The program aim will support and sustain tenancies in social housing by:
  - Better matching housing and need for early housing applicants not eligible for assistance through homelessness or disability providers.
  - Assisting to establish successful tenancies.
  - Intervening when tenancies are at risk.
  - Providing advocacy and support for tenants who require assistance with: complaints, appeals, at Victorian Civil and Administrative Tribunal, or in the resolution of complex issues; or accessing assistance to sustain their tenancy through providers such as community health.
  - Contributing to tenant participation.

The principal foci for the new program will be on establishing successful tenancies and intervening when tenancies are at risk. This latter component of the program will mainstream the VHS Tenancies at Risk Pilot, drawing on its learnings to provide a crisis intervention.

A key tool to be used by local Housing Offices and SHASP providers in establishing successful tenancies will be the development of a 'housing action plan' to be developed with the prospective tenant. This plan will identify strategies to manage risk around four key action areas:

1. Regular payment of rent.
2. Preventing anti-social behaviour.
3. Preventing tenant damage.
4. Connectedness to community, including access to support services, local community services and participation in local community life.

The capacity of local community based providers and local housing office staff to work collaboratively in the best interests of sustaining the tenancy will be vital.

At this point it is planned that 1500 new tenancies each year will receive intensive tenancy management and around 1,000 tenancies will be assisted with crisis intervention if at risk of failing.

## **17. Better Tenant Access to Mainstream Systems**

While progress has been made on this front, much remains to be achieved. On the positive side for example, each of the 13 older persons high rise towers now has Older Persons Support Worker positions funded through aged care programs. These workers are on-site during the day and provide a comprehensive range of referral options and services. Aged care programs also fund an aged housing linkages worker in each DHS region.

Further, in 2005/06, DHS will undertake a project to look at the continuing care needs of public housing tenants with multiple/complex needs for whom existing mainstream responses, based on episodes of intervention in moments of crisis, are inadequate. One group that will have a particular focus is tenants with a personality and/or behavioural disorder.

However, much work remains to be done in this area, leveraging off the advantages of OoH being in DHS and at the same time avoiding the temptation for OoH to start building its own care programs to fill the gaps in the broader mainstream system.

## **PART E: CHALLENGE OF MAKING IT HAPPEN**

The new arrangements outlined in this paper, mean further improvements in the sustainability of tenancies are in sight.

However, the types of arrangements outlined in this paper to better sustain tenancies provide a range of challenges for all stakeholders.

New business systems, common assessment tools, protocols and data collections will be required.

Regional housing office staff will need to develop new skills and greater confidence in assisting tenants with complex needs, including a greater capacity to assess their circumstances and work with community partners to address tenant needs and sustain tenancies.

Community based providers will need to develop stronger collaborative arrangements with local housing office staff, moving from an advocacy approach (at times based on a adversarial model) to a partnering approach based around agreed outcomes and a common housing action plan.

In the first instance, these efforts to better sustain tenancies will be focussed upon improving the outcomes for those exiting homelessness, and preventing public housing tenants from becoming homeless.

However, the changes now underway, with their capacity to respond to individual need, also provide a broader platform for better coping with further changes in the needs of public housing tenants and tenancies into the future.