

National Housing Conference 2005

Title: Dilemmas in the Targeting of Social Housing

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Abstract:

National housing policy over the last decade has taken the path of tighter targeting of direct housing assistance under the Commonwealth State Housing Agreement (CSHA) to those in greatest need. On the surface this would seem to be a logical approach that aims to make best use of limited resources. From the vantage point of 2005, however, it is apparent that this highly targeted approach has contributed to concentrations of disadvantage in social housing in many cities and regional centres.

It is also apparent that this approach to targeting is not matched in other areas of housing assistance policy.

The legacies of prevailing housing policies, and the fragile nature of some tenancies and broader communities, present an ongoing challenge for housing authorities and governments. International commentators claim that the presence of significant areas of disadvantage contributes to the economic decline of cities, and should be addressed as a priority.

The challenges are complex and substantial. Our resource base for direct housing assistance for those unable to meet market housing solutions has been eroded over this period. Commonwealth fiscal policies and complementary subsidies such as the first home owners' grant and rent assistance have increasingly favoured the wealthy.

The current path is not sustainable from a social or economic perspective and it is clear that Australia needs to modernise its housing system. Affordable housing for all groups in society needs national attention and an innovative approach. Widening the responsibility for housing outcomes is the key. A greater contribution from the private sector and through our land and planning systems will be necessary to achieve growth and diversity in affordable housing for low income families and single people.

The best way forward is to move to a more balanced, diversified approach. But it is likely to be difficult to move to a more balanced approach unless the change is coupled with a significant strategy for growth of affordable housing.

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