

## **Welfare to Work Reforms: Labour Market Participation and Subsidised Housing Tenants**

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### **Abstract**

This paper will discuss the potential impact of the Government's Welfare to Work reforms on subsidised housing tenants<sup>1</sup> in receipt of Disability Support Pension, Parenting Payment Single and Newstart Allowance. Disincentives to work, security of housing tenure, client motivation to participate in community and employment programs, public and community housing eligibility and length of tenure are some of the issues emerging with welfare reform.

At JOB *futures*<sup>2</sup> programs are designed and delivered with the primary goal of assisting people to gain and maintain employment. The majority of employment services are funded by DEWR<sup>3</sup>, and particular focus is given to specialised groups, particularly those identified in the Welfare Reform. Recent figures from the NSW Department of Housing (2003)<sup>4</sup> indicate that 90% of Government housing participants are in receipt of a Centrelink benefit, with a high proportion being Disability Support Pension and Parenting Payment recipients.

Melanie Hughes (2004)<sup>5</sup> discusses social, economic and labour market programs delivered to subsidised housing tenants in public housing estates in South Australia, New South Wales and Victoria. A point of particular importance emerging in the paper is the lack of programs taking into account the needs of subsidised tenants, including those housed through Community Housing providers in the private rental market in generalised employment services. While needs-specific services are essential in creating a bridge from non-participation in community or labour market programs, it is also of great importance to enhance wider community participation of subsidised tenants participating in generalist services that are accommodating to any specialised needs.

The implications of welfare reform will be explored within the framework of emerging opportunities to build community and Government partnerships to support an overall increase in labour market participation of subsidised housing tenants.

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<sup>1</sup> Subsidized/assisted tenants means tenants entitled to a rental rebate whereby their rent is paid for significantly under the market rent for that area. Tenants may be in Government housing programs or Community Housing programs.

<sup>2</sup> JOB *futures* is one of the largest community-based Job Network employment agencies, with over 30 sites operating in all States and Territories. The network provides training, education, case management and group-based programs to create employment opportunities for clients.

<sup>3</sup> Department of Employment and Workplace Relations, Employment Services Contract 3.

<sup>4</sup> NSW Department of Housing *Annual Report 2003 – People First*, Department of Housing, Ashfield, NSW.

<sup>5</sup> Hughes, M, 'Community economic development and public housing estates', Background Paper, Shelter NSW, 2004.

**Submission Category:** Workshop and Practitioner Forum Papers and Presentations.

## Summary of Paper and Presentation in the Workshop Category

### Relevance to Conference Themes

The Workshop and Background Paper explores a number of the identified conference themes, including Challenges for Public Housing, in understanding the implications of Welfare to Work Reform on subsidised housing tenants. Within this theme, the Workshop uses case studies that illustrate the housing experience in this context of a diverse group of clients, including single parents, people with disabilities, and those in rural and remote locations.

### Intended Audience

The Workshop aims to engage a variety of practitioners and policy-makers in a discussion of the issues regarding Welfare to Work reforms and the implication of labour market participation of subsidised housing tenants. It would be suited to those involved in Government and community housing allocation and policy development, social policy practitioners, community and Government housing workers, housing tenant advocates, community workers, housing tenants, and those involved in the provision of health, welfare and employment services to subsidised housing tenants.

### Delivery

#### *PowerPoint Overview*

A brief overview of the Welfare to Work reforms and how those changes may affect subsidised housing tenants will be presented using PowerPoint summaries which can be provided to the participants on request.

#### *Audiovisual Segment*

A short video presentation will be shown illustrating labour market engagement programs at JOB futures sites with specific target groups of Single Parents to provide insight into how programs work in delivery and that take into account the importance of stable and secure housing while looking at transition to work.

#### *Case Studies*

Client case studies illustrate the issues and invite audience participation, and perspectives from different practitioners.

#### *Future Directions*

Implications for policy and program delivery in housing services.

### Contact Details of Presenters

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**Key Words:** Labour market participation