

YOUTH HOMELESSNESS

**298. Hon SHELLEY ARCHER to the Minister for Youth:**

In light of the recent statistics indicating that youth homelessness is a major problem around Australia and that Western Australia is one of the worst states, with 18 in every 1 000 young people being homeless —

- (1) What has the government done in the past four years to alleviate youth homelessness?
- (2) What are the government's future plans for addressing the problem of youth homelessness?
- (3) Will the government commit to establishing a ministerial advisory council on youth homelessness to bring together experts from the non-government and government sector to deal with the problem?
- (4) Is the minister aware that the Youth Affairs Council of Western Australia wrote to her office on 16 January, seeking a meeting on these and other important issues?
- (5) Will the minister arrange this meeting as a matter of urgency?
- (6) If no to (5), why not?

**Hon LJILJANNA RAVLICH replied:**

I thank the member for some notice of this question. In view of the fact that the response runs into two pages, I seek leave to table the document and have it incorporated into *Hansard*.

Leave granted.

[See paper 3867.]

The following material was incorporated —

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**I thank the Hon. Member for some notice of this question.**

- (1) In 2007-08, through the joint Commonwealth/State Supported Accommodation Assistance program (SAAP) funding of over \$10 million per annum is provided for 37 services for homeless young people. In addition to SAAP services, the Department for Child Protection provides nearly \$4 million per annum in 2007-08 for 54 services for young people.  
  
In 2006-07 the State budget included the first real increase in funding for joint Commonwealth/State Supported Accommodation Assistance Program (SAAP) services since 1998-99 which was over and above the requirements of joint Commonwealth/State SAAP V Agreement. The additional funding was made up of a core funding increase of 10 percent on the State Government's contribution for each service (\$5 million over four years) and increased indexation on the state's contribution to SAAP services (\$1.5 million over four years).  
  
In May last year, the State Government committed \$447 million in funding to help make housing more affordable in Western Australia and in September, the Government announced a further \$238 million housing package with a major focus on accommodation for lower income earners.  
  
The low rental vacancy rate and increase in rents are contributing to the pressure on emergency accommodation services. The State Government recognises this, and has introduced a number of measures to respond to the crisis in rental accommodation, such as:
    - broadened access to and increased Bond Assistance,
    - reformed tenancy laws to prohibit the levying of letting fees,
    - provision of funding to the Tenants Advice Bureau which gives free legal advice to people regarding their tenancy rights (which is particularly important to young people who are generally less experienced with the rental market and less aware of their legal rights as tenants), and
    - provision of funding to Uniting Care West to run *HomeConnect* a service to help disadvantaged tenants to secure rental housing.
  - (2) The State Government will continue to work towards improving responses to alleviate youth homelessness in Western Australia.  
  
In the new spirit of cooperative federalism, I look forward to entering into new partnerships with the Rudd Labor Government to tackle homelessness. The Prime Minister has appointed two Ministers for Housing—the Hon Jenny Macklin MP is the Minister for Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs; and the Hon Tanya Plibersek MP is responsible for Housing which includes the joint Commonwealth/State Supported Accommodation Assistance Program.  
  
I was also pleased to learn of Federal Labor's plans to introduce a National Rental Affordability Scheme, which will provide tax incentives to increase the supply of affordable rental properties and invest \$150 million over 5 years to build 600 homes for the homeless.
  - (3) The Supported Accommodation Assistance Program State Advisory Committee is an independent committee that reports to the Minister for Child Protection; Communities on SAAP and homelessness issues. The Committee includes government and non-government representatives.
  - (4)-(6) The Executive Officer from the Youth Affairs Council of WA did write to me on 16 January 2008 to introduce the organisation and explain its role. That letter expressed general interest in a meeting, but no specific date was mentioned. However, I can advise that a meeting is in the process of being arranged.
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