

The Equal Opportunity Commission's Housing Investigation Update

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The Equal Opportunity Commission has formed a partnership with the Department of Housing and Works to put into place the DHW "Finding a Place" Action Plan.

'Homing In' briefings and workshops have been delivered to many metropolitan DHW staff. The aim of these briefings and workshops is to improve services to Aboriginal tenants and applicants.

The next step will be to give regional staff access to similar briefings and workshops, so they are also aware of all aspects of the DHW "Finding a Place" Action Plan.



This year Housing Inquiry and Substantive Equality issues are being dealt with by a new Social Inclusion Unit within DHW that includes Deb King (Policy Officer) and Terry Daly (Manager), assisted by G Marque Raymond of the Commission (left).*

In November 2006, 88 responses to the Commission's 2004 *Finding a Place Section 80 Inquiry Report* were published on the DHW website, grouped under DHW's five workplan areas. Those areas are Building on the best, Communicating, Review and Rebuild, Responsiveness and Training.

As a result DHW's Housing Management Services (formerly Homeswest) has **signalled changes to the way its Rental Policy Manual will be used as well as changes to the manual itself**, to make it easier for staff and clients to read and understand.

Once these changes are implemented it will be easier for staff to apply discretion in favour of a client and their cultural needs, addressing layers of Indigenous disadvantage.

The challenge of social rather than public housing also means DHW now needs to consider the tenants themselves as well as the house.

DHW is also keen to lock in support to families in need from other government agencies so they, as much as the tenants, are responsible for the success or failure of each Indigenous housing situation.

DHW's Housing Management Services has also started a review of its database on tenants.

This review will consider a range of issues including confidentiality, relevance, identity and the overall management of individual clients and families.

Culturally and linguistically diverse clients, other than Aboriginal, will also be included as the Commission helps DHW apply substantive equality.*

One way this will be done, is through the Commission's efforts to change DHW's Rental Policy Manual to help clients in debt. Many DHW clients who have debts are Aboriginal, and current DHW debt policy has more of a negative impact on them than other client groups.

The Commission, the Tenants Advice Service and DHW are working on this issue, with legal advice sought. When this advice is received it will be incorporated into existing research and hopefully result in policy changes that will benefit DHW clients and the DHW bottom line.

The EOC-DHW partnership will continue for two years under a Cabinet-approved Housing Rights Project, with Equal Opportunity Commissioner Yvonne Henderson and DHW Director General Bob Mitchell meeting regularly to guide the partnership.

During 2007 the Commissioner will try to visit each regional centre where information was collected during the Commission's 2002-04 *Finding a Place Section 80 Inquiry*, to inform local people on progress to date. The initial visits will be held in the South of WA, with later visits being held in the North West.

In terms of changes on the ground in 2007, the most obvious will be the phased introduction of 'Plain English' letters to tenants from DHW.

The Housing Inquiry Implementation and Monitoring Group meets every two months and will continue to meet until the 'Housing Rights Project' is completed.

*Substantive equality is a policy framework that recognises the need to provide different support to different people according to their needs to ensure equal outcomes.