


The nature and extent of housing need in WA



Paul Flatau
Murdoch University



Addressing Housing Need and Homelessness in Western Australia

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**Paul Flatau
Murdoch University**

[Outline]

- Ends, means and constraints
- Defining 'housing need' and 'homelessness'
- Housing need and homelessness in WA
- The current policy response
- Where to from here?

Ends - What should we aim for?

- As a community we should aim to ensure that:
 - All have a right to adequate, safe and secure shelter
 - All who experience a disability or a serious mental or physical health condition, together with their carers, have a right to support services to enable them to participate in everyday community life on equal terms with others

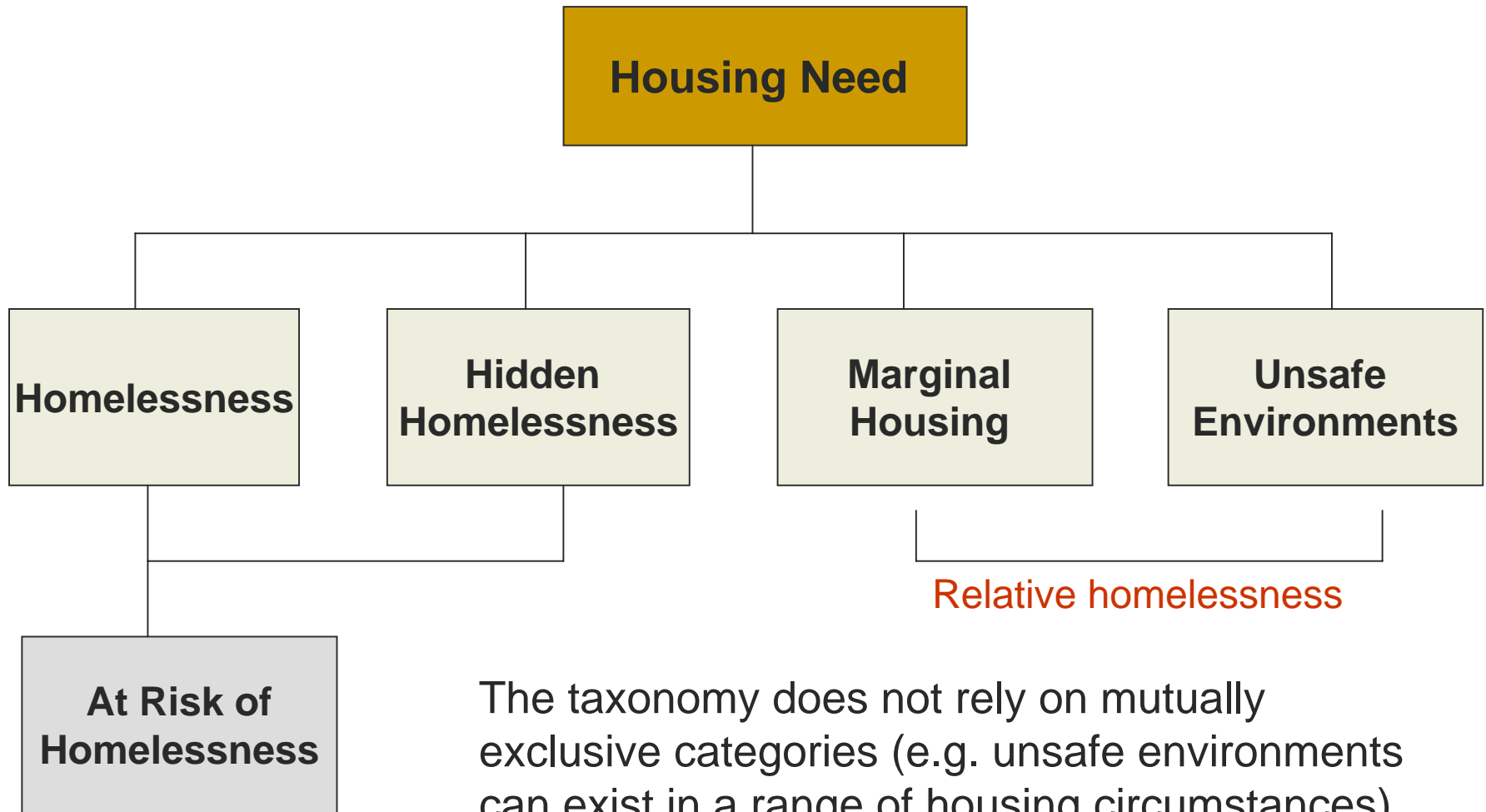
[Means & Constraints]

- Our ability to achieve the rights/equality objective is constrained by the **resources** we apply to meet the problem
 - But there is ultimately **nothing fixed** about the level resources that governments, agencies and people apply to providing assistance to those in need
 - Advocate for more resources – seek more external sources of funds
- The extent to which we achieve our objective is also a function of the **means** adopted to achieve our ends – the **effectiveness** of the services undertaken to alleviate homelessness and housing need

Means & Constraints

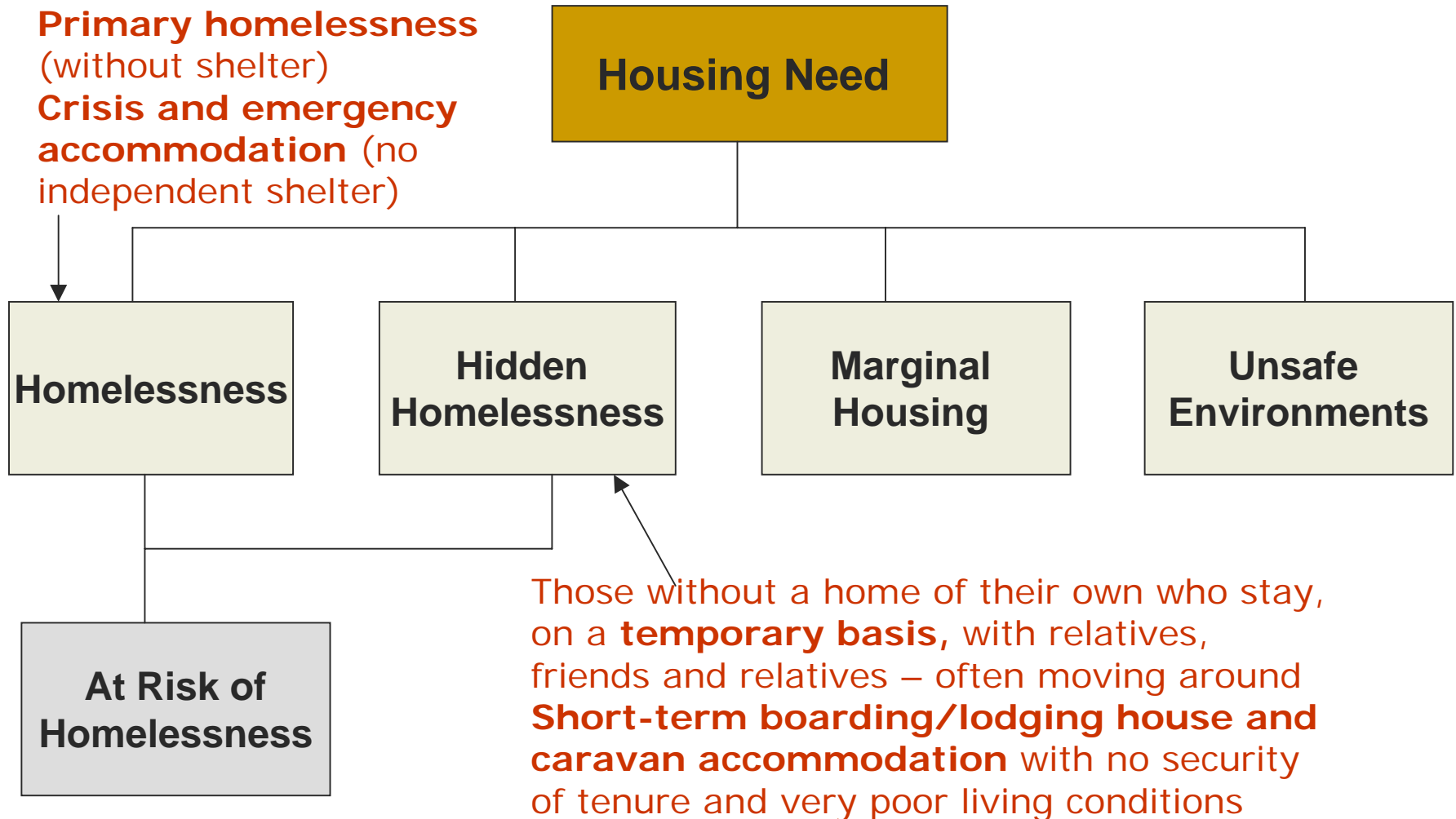
- **Means/Effectiveness:** Evaluate current programs and search for ways to improve on what is we do with the resources available
 - Develop the right set/mix of programs that target key remaining gaps in terms of housing need and homelessness;
 - Allocate resources efficiently between different areas and reduce wastage;
 - Adopt appropriate service delivery models relative to needs and agency strengths to achieve the best possible outcomes;
 - Deliver services that meet the individual needs of clients

Categories of Housing Need

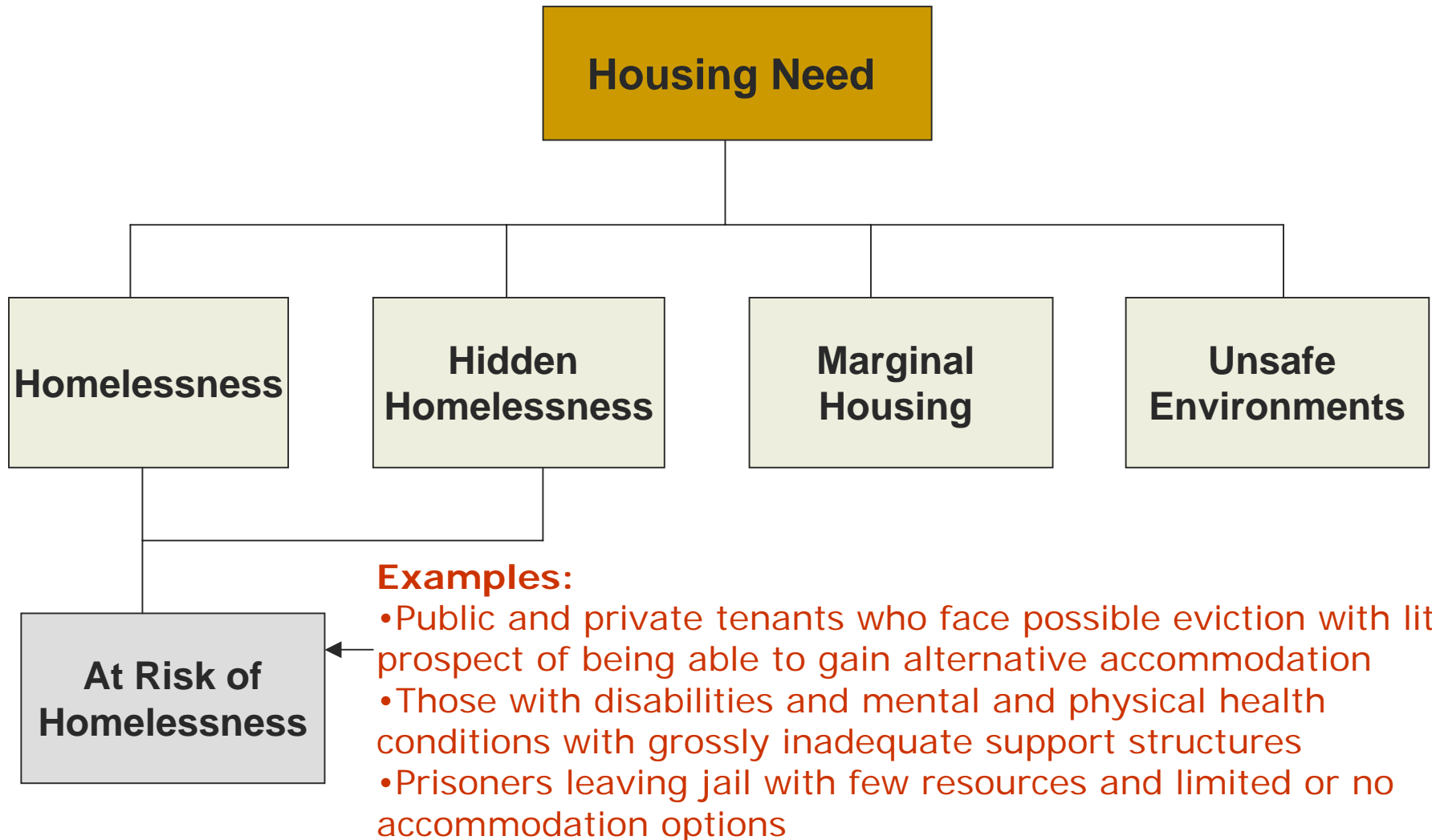


The taxonomy does not rely on mutually exclusive categories (e.g. unsafe environments can exist in a range of housing circumstances)

Categories of Housing Need



Categories of Housing Need



Categories of Housing Need

Housing Need

Marginal housing refers to **inadequate accommodation given community standards**

Marginal Housing

• Poor dwelling conditions (major structural repairs required) and/or inadequate connections to essential services (water, electricity and sewerage)

- Overcrowding
- Inadequate conditions and/or insecurity of tenure in long-term caravan park and boarding house environments
- Housing cost stress for those in low net wealth poverty

• Inappropriate dwellings and/or support levels given the special needs of the person and household (disabilities, mental and physical health, frailty)

Housing Need in WA

Homelessness

- 2000-4000 **primary homeless** – figures depend on the source used (*2001 Community Housing and Infrastructure Needs Survey* of Indigenous communities vs Census)
- 600-650 adults (18 & over) + accompanying children (around 400) receiving accommodation support in **SAAP** – Aboriginal people overrepresented.

Hidden Homelessness

- Up to 7500 **temporary stays** in homes

Hidden
+
Marginal
+
Adequate

- 2000 people in boarding houses
- 2500 people living in caravan parks

Housing Need in WA

Marginal Housing

- **Overcrowding** (very high in WA and NT) - 1,265 per 10,000 in the WA Indigenous population & 87 per 10,000 in the WA non-Indigenous population
- **Inadequate dwelling conditions:** Around 1/4 to 1/3 of Indigenous community household dwellings require major structural repairs - Connections to essential services: Up to 8 per cent of Indigenous community housing dwellings not connected to water/electricity/sewerage
- **Supports for special needs:** The majority of those with severe and profound disabilities applying for Accommodation Support Funding with the Disability Services Commission do not receive funding. Long waiting lists in the Independent Living Program
- **Affordability:** Of private renters who are in the bottom 40 per cent of incomes in WA over 75 per cent are paying more than 25 per cent of their income in housing – but 40th percentile is too high

[Housing Need in WA]

Unsafe Environments

- **Violence in the home.** Women escaping family/domestic violence remains the largest presenting reason for SAAP.
- Increased incidence of domestic violence reports
- High turnaway rates from SAAP services among women and accompanying children
- Funds applied may not adequately support children in refuges with children not treated directly as clients

Current Responses to Housing Need and Homelessness

- The current levels of homelessness and housing need indicate that our objectives are not being met.
- What then should our response be?
 - Resources
 - Program enhancement and enhancing the effectiveness of services to be delivered

Current Responses to Housing Need and Homelessness

- **WA Homelessness Strategy** – Focus on prevention and bypass - met a real gap in the then existing range of support services
 - **Extension of the existing Supported Housing Assistance Program (SHAP) + SHAP Homeless Helpline**
 - An excellent program that has achieved good outcomes in terms of the sustainability of tenancies
 - Issues: The absence of early intervention support for those entering public housing from homelessness - still focussed almost entirely on those at risk of losing their tenancy (actual practice differs sometimes); expansion of funded non-tenancy support functions (actual practice can differ)

Current Responses to Housing Need and Homelessness

- **WA Homelessness Strategy -**
 - **Private tenancy support programs + Re-entry link and TASS for ex-prisoners**
 - Issues: Low funding levels – spending per case-managed client; gaps in service provision (e.g., locational in the private rental support program);
 - **New mental health community initiatives**
 - Issue: Slow implementation when the need is great
 - **Maintenance of Homeless Helpline and introduction of the Wesley HomeLink service**
 - Issues: Expand services in terms of those trying to access the private rental market with a history of poor tenancies and ongoing housing support and case management needs
 - **Consultative mechanisms**
 - Issue: Absence of advisory + consultative mechanisms bringing agencies and program administrators together on homelessness in an integrated way (prevention and SAAP)

Current Responses to Housing Need and Homelessness

- **The Supported Accommodation Assistance Program (SAAP)** - Key strength is the role played by diverse, independent and committed community agencies with a focussed mission of achieving better outcomes for their clients
- Issues:
 - **More beds** in crisis and transitional accommodation - high turnaway rates;
 - **Limited exit options** – more particularly **exit points with support** – *without supported pathways (for those who need support post exit) from SAAP to independent living there is a sense in which we are setting many people to fail – the revolving door*

Current Responses to Housing Need and Homelessness

■ The **Supported Accommodation Assistance Program (SAAP)**

- **Gate-keeping problems** in relation to complex cases and those with threatening behaviours (staff occupational health and safety issues) – this requires more funding for those services dealing with these cases;
- **On-site bundling** of programs/services (e.g., mental health, drug and alcohol) to provide integrated tailored packages of support to individual clients.
 - There exists mechanisms to do this – e.g., a number of agencies in WA have brought together NIDS grant money with SAAP core support. However, only a limited number of agencies will be able to access these resources and they often come with short shelf lives.

Agencies breaking down the 'silos' of different programs

Current Responses to Housing Need and Homelessness

■ The **Supported Accommodation Assistance Program (SAAP)**

- Development of street-based early intervention and case-managed outreach services
- Current **crisis in private rental exit points** with young people and those with poor tenancy histories attempting to exit into the private rental market– high rents and low availability of housing options – cream skimming
- Use of low-cost private hotels for those in crisis with an expressed assessed high need unsatisfactory (but reflects the house full sign and better than no action and is well-managed)

Current Responses to Housing Need and Homelessness

- **Mental health:** The **Independent Living Program** has had a major positive impact on the ability of those who experience mental health problems to live in the community with support. Deinstitutionalisation has had a major impact on levels of need
 - Homelessness Strategy initiatives in mental health have not been fully implemented and the waiting lists for the Independent Living Program among community housing providers is unacceptably large
- **Disabilities:** The Unmet Needs Working Group report on *Identifying the Need* and the Development Disabilities Council Report *When Needs Go Begging* point to extremely high levels of unmet needs among those with severe and profound disabilities – problem is being compounded over time in terms of Disability Services Commission applications
- Those in the less than severe and profound needs category face significant problems in terms of homelessness with few services being provided for this group

Current Responses to Housing Need and Homelessness

- **Public housing** remains a primary accommodation exit point for those people exiting SAAP
 - Co-ordinated priority access from agencies in the SAAP sector to Homeswest is fundamental to meeting housing need and homelessness objectives
 - Barriers to entry in terms of adverse tenancy history (including debts, abandonment, eviction, excessive repairs, noise and nuisance complaints) now much reduced but still apparently an important issue on the ground with many agencies
 - Too many stories from agencies of otherwise eligible clients not being able to gain access to priority housing waiting lists

Current Responses to Housing Need and Homelessness

■ Public housing

- Insufficient places with a declining public housing stock is the major policy concern – largely a federal funding issue.
- We need to consider very seriously the role of **increased turnover** of existing tenants and the extension of **priority access allocations** relative to wait-turn allocations
 - An even greater emphasis on priority access changes the nature of public housing but it is a change that is required given the continued decline in the public housing stock

Current Responses to Housing Need and Homelessness

■ Indigenous housing

- One very important area of success in terms of public housing has been the **increased access to mainstream public housing** by Indigenous people in WA in housing need – the growth in access (new assists and share of the stock) in WA since 2000 has been far in excess of all other jurisdictions
- A significant program of works in Indigenous communities is required to:
 - Build dwellings to overcome primary homelessness and overcrowding
 - Fix existing buildings with major structural damage
 - Connect dwellings to water, electricity and sewerage
 - Develop community capacities

BBF framework

Current Responses to Housing Need and Homelessness

- **Discrete Indigenous Communities** - In WA we have seen DHW implement a new approach based on a complete package framework applied community by community – strategic interlinking of options
 - Investment
 - Repairs and maintenance
 - Tenancy management
 - Tenancy support
 - Skills (Indigenous Apprenticeships) and business development – hopefully will build capacities in Indigenous communities

Current Responses to Housing Need and Homelessness

- The new programs will fall short of the 1000 dwellings in discrete indigenous communities houses required to immediately bring down primary homelessness and overcrowding but it is a major start
- From mid-2007, The *Housing, Infrastructure and Essential Services for Indigenous People in WA Agreement* (joint federal/state agreement) takes funding away from town-based communities – critical that new funding is applied by the WA Government across all town-based communities

[Conclusion]

- Continued high levels of unmet housing need and homelessness evident
- We are not meeting our objectives
- But we can with resources (changing priorities of spending), development of new programs, enhancement of existing programs and consistently thinking through how we deliver services