

# The Equal Opportunity Commission's Housing Investigation Update

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**THE Equal Opportunity Commission's housing investigation report titled *Finding a Place*, plus an accompanying video and DVD, was released on December 15, 2004.**

The report contained 165 recommendations.

The report was launched at the Commission and was attended by more than 100 community and government representatives, and attracted intense interest and coverage from national and statewide media.

One of the report's key recommendations was for a broadly-based Implementation and Monitoring Group to be established, with its first priority being to produce a program for the implementation, monitoring and review of recommendations contained within the report. It was recommended this group include representation from the Department of Housing and Works as well as community advocacy groups and other relevant Government departments.

**The Section 80 Implementation and Monitoring Committee includes representation from the following groups:**

- Equal Opportunity Commission
- Department of Consumer and Employment Protection
- Department for Community Development
- Department of Indigenous Affairs
- Tenancy Advice Service
- Disability Services Commission
- CPSU/CSA
- Deaths in Custody Watch Committee
- Katanning Aboriginal Corporation

- Port Hedland – community representative
- Kalgoorlie Indigenous Advocates
- Department of Education and Training
- Perth – Section 80 Reference Group
- Roebourne – Women for Stronger Communities
- Perth – community representative
- Telethon Institute for Child Health Research
- Aboriginal Legal Service
- Jackaranda Community Centre
- WACOSS
- Shelter WA
- Noongar Mia Mia; and
- Kimberley Community Legal Service.

The National Network of Indigenous Women's Legal Services and the Indigenous Women's Congress WA have also been invited to participate in the Committee.

## **Homeswest Participation**

While the Department of Housing and Works did not wish to be represented on this committee, they have allocated some funds to Shelter WA to progress some of the recommendations of the report.

In addition, a working party has been formed to respond to Recommendation 7. This working party consists of members of the Housing Operational Standing Committee (HOSC).

Following the working party review of Recommendation 7, the Department of Housing and Works will engage an independent person to undertake the final editing.

**The Department of Housing and Works has agreed to implement nine of the recommendations as a priority. They are:**

**Recommendation 7:** An independent person/s or organisation with expertise in the **use of plain English** to be contracted by the DHW in consultation with the Implementation Group to review all policies, documents, brochures (written materials) developed by Homeswest to ensure their ready comprehension by Aboriginal people

**Recommendation 8:** Homeswest to produce **clear simple brochures/fact sheets** setting out their policies. Priority in the production of these brochures to be given to issues highlighted in this report, for example:

- access to priority assistance
- requirements for emergency housing
- access to transfers
- maintenance
- eviction policies
- tenant liability
- appeals mechanisms; and
- urgent assistance to victims of domestic violence.

**Recommendation 11:** Language, distribution and cultural considerations are to **vary according to the region.**

**Recommendation 16:** Homeswest to engage external consultants to evaluate their **website for ease of accessibility** by their clients, particularly having regard for literacy and cultural issues that affect Aboriginal people. Homeswest website is to meet minimum government guidelines for accessibility, in any event.

**Recommendation 17:** All standard letters are to be re-written in **plain English** and to give contact persons by name and telephone numbers.

**Recommendation 18:** Notices to be redrafted in **plain English** and, where forms are prescribed under an Act (for example, the RTA), to provide clear information describing the:

- content and effect of the notice
- what the consequences are of doing or failing to do certain acts; and
- the right of the tenant to challenge any notice if this is applicable to be provided.

Such notices to provide regularly reviewed and updated lists of community advocacy and/or tenancy advocacy services, including any Aboriginal support services, from which clients can seek assistance in understanding their rights about such notices.

**Recommendation 58:** Before any rental subsidy is removed from a tenant as a result of a non-lodgement of a form a **face-to-face meeting** is to occur between the tenant and the DHW.

**Recommendation 100:** Ensure that all members of the appeals committees are **adequately trained** in relevant issues such as the RTA 1987, the Equal Opportunity Act 1984 and are able to demonstrate an understanding of cultural diversity and anti-racism strategies.

**Recommendation 120:** Homeswest is to maintain and update a **database of comparative data** with respect to Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal tenants, and applicants for housing. The data must be in a form that allows a comparison between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people with respect to the application of and their compliance with each of the Homeswest policies and procedures.

A copy of the Finding a Place report can be downloaded from the Commission's website at [www.eoc.wa.gov.au](http://www.eoc.wa.gov.au) or by contacting the Equal Opportunity Commission.

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