

New provider of supported housing

The NSW Department of Housing is establishing a not-for-profit company to provide supported housing in inner Sydney with the working title 'Bennelong Housing Company'. This initiative is intended to assist people whose needs are not being adequately met through existing housing options. By establishing the company, the Department hopes to expand the range of housing and support models available to different client groups and to increase opportunities for clients to sustain their tenancies.

Many support agencies participated in workshops held by the Department in 2002 to canvass proposals and seek input. Some client groups identified through initial consultations and planning include:

- people with disability
- single men with mental health problems and/or drug or alcohol dependency
- single women currently relying on crisis accommodation
- single indigenous males and females with problems of cultural dislocation, mental health
- and/or drug or alcohol dependency
- lone parents with children who have been relying on crisis accommodation

Core eligibility for people housed by Bennelong Housing Company will be:

- either priority approved status on the Department's Housing Register or demonstrated equivalent housing needs
- assessed as unlikely to sustain a social housing tenancy without dedicated support services
- interested in housing located in the inner Sydney area and assessed as needing access to facilities specific to the area

Bennelong Housing Company will provide a wide range of housing and support options for multiple target groups, including transitional and longer-term accommodation, floating care, furnished and unfurnished units as well as in-house caretakers. It will ensure that housing is an integral component of the overall assistance package provided for each client. The initiative targets a range of priority groups, although individuals and households must be eligible for priority social housing assistance.

Through a 'register of interest' process which closed on 4 February 2004, the Department is identifying initial 'preferred support partners' to participate in the development of the initiative and to work with Bennelong Housing Company to ensure housing meets clients' needs. Preferred partners will be made up of various Agencies currently delivering support services in the inner-Sydney area and, ideally, have existing clients who may be appropriate for Bennelong Housing Company.

The key components of the initiative are:

- the creation of a specialist housing company
- development of agreements with inner Sydney support providers (preferred partners), to broker and deliver support services
- acquisition of properties – to build a housing portfolio that accommodates people with a spectrum of short and long term support needs

An independent corporate structure will allow the company to pursue partnerships with local support providers, be responsive to individual needs and work cooperatively with not-for-profit organisations.

To establish Bennelong Housing Company, the Department of Housing has purchased (and started upgrading) properties in several inner-Sydney suburbs. Some of these properties will be available in early to mid 2004. The properties will provide a selection of furnished and unfurnished accommodation. An expansion of the housing portfolio to around 200 properties is planned. Both Bennelong Housing Company and support providers will work in partnership to ensure that any new housing opportunities are appropriate for the current and future needs of clients, represent value for money and can be maintained in the long term.

Bennelong Housing Company will not operate a general housing register or waiting list. All Bennelong Housing Company properties will be tenanted using nomination and referral arrangements with preferred partners, social housing providers and relevant government services.

Whilst the call for registrations of interest for 'preferred partners' has now closed, the Department welcomes comments or suggestions from support providers or others interested in the initiative. The Department is particularly interested in comments and suggestions relating to specific supported housing needs within the inner-Sydney area and priorities for future accommodation acquisitions.

Further information about the initiative is available by contacting:
The Supported Housing Initiative
NSW Department of Housing
Locked Bag 4001, Ashfield BC 1800
Email: Supportedhousing@housing.nsw.gov.au
Phone: (02)8753 8784
Website: www.housing.nsw.gov.au