



## Big changes for Public Housing

The State government's conclusive reforms to Public Housing are now being implemented by the Department of Housing (DoH) and have received wide criticism from the community sector. An end to security of tenure, changes to eligibility for new applicants and rents increases are the most significant changes under the reform package, Reshaping Public Housing, established in April 2005.

The removal of security of tenure may have far-reaching ramifications as DoH staff will now have to make judgments about the circumstances of tenants and their prospects for improvement. Shelter NSW have commented that this could create a churning of tenants in between private rental, public housing and homelessness, especially as the overall supply of public housing will not increase over the next ten years. It is also feared that changes to eligibility will reduce the diversity of the social profile of DoH tenants, thus compounding problems associated with concentrating people with complex needs on one form of housing.

Housing peaks including Shelter NSW and key welfare organisations have been engaged as part of an implementation reference group working with DoH. Engagement with the NGO's has already resulted in some agreement for the amelioration of possible ways the policies will be implemented.

The Reference Group are currently addressing the most immediate issues, being water charges to tenants and criteria for allocation into housing. The first new tenants have already received one year leases and upon expiry will be offered fixed term leases in line with the new policy, if they are eligible.

Applicants who applied for public housing before the changes were announced (27 April 2005) will be assessed under the old, income criteria. Applicants who apply between 27 April 2005 and 30 June 2006 will be assessed under the old income criteria, but will be re-assessed under the new criteria after 1 July 2006. Applicants who apply from 1 July 2006 will be assessed under the new criteria.

People are encouraged to express their views to government about the Reform Package to the new Housing Minister, Ms Cherie Burton. To view the original policy and detailed FactSheets about the changes, visit the Department of Housing website: <http://www.housing.nsw.gov.au/>

The changes to NSW public housing fall into three broad areas.

- Changes that will reinforce and entrench the focus of the welfare housing sector on those 'most in need'
  - Changes to eligibility for new applicants
  - Institution of fixed-term (renewable) tenancies for new tenants
  - Rent levels at 30% of income for moderate-income earners
- Changes to generate revenue
  - Reviews of market rents
  - Rent levels at 30% of income for moderate-income tenants
  - Increased take from family tax benefit for rent-setting
  - Water charges passed on to tenants
- Changes to soften the blow
  - Commitments on upgrading and reconfiguring existing stock
  - Improvements to maintenance program
  - Improvements to relations with other human service agencies