

**Submission
No 29**

TENANCY MANAGEMENT IN SOCIAL HOUSING

Organisation: Wentworth Community Housing
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Position: Chief Executive Officer
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The Committee Manager
Public Accounts Committee (PAC)
Parliament House
Macquarie St
Sydney NSW 2000

Dear Sir/Madam,

RE: INQUIRY INTO TENANCY MANAGEMENT IN SOCIAL HOUSING

Wentworth Community Housing is a large and experienced community housing provider managing over 2,000 properties and tenancies across the Outer Western Sydney region. Tier 1 registered under the National Regulatory System and fully accredited against National Community Housing standards, Wentworth is a leading provider of quality affordable and social housing solutions and tenancy support to over 4,000 families and individuals each year.

The NSW Federation of Housing Associations, the peak body for community housing providers has prepared a substantial submission to this inquiry. As a Federation member we support their submission, however, also provide a brief response to highlight some specific examples of Wentworth's contribution to tenancy management services specific to the reference term - *'the range and effectiveness of support services to tenants in social housing'*.

Social housing is an increasingly scarce resource and as such is targeted to those whose needs are greatest. Often it is people with the most complex needs who are unable to live independently in the private market who reside in social housing, whether managed by public or community housing providers.

Wentworth's tenant profile demonstrates that only the most needy are provided safe secure housing. Over 45% of our tenants have a disability whether physical, mental or psychiatric, 98% are in receipt of a government benefit, over three quarters are single people or sole parent families, 8% of head tenants are Indigenous and up to 7% are under formal support agreements with specific support agencies.

Managing tenant complexity is something Wentworth and the broader community housing sector does well and, importantly, needs to do well.

Social housing is for many the last or only chance to obtain safe, secure and affordable housing and an opportunity to participate meaningfully in the community. Wentworth's aim is to 'sustain tenancies and build communities'. We have extensive tenancy management experience with a real strength in our

approach being the capacity to link tenants to the service support system and broker agencies to work together to address complex social need.

For example:

- Links to support
Wentworth is well connected to the local service system having formal partnerships with 35 different support agencies to provide 134 housing and support outcomes for people with complex needs including those with disabilities, mental health issues, drug and alcohol issues, women escaping Domestic Violence and the homeless. Depending on the complexity of the clients needs, often coordinated and robust case planning is required, involving a cluster of partners and/ or senior executives from both Government and non-Government agencies in determining the best supports and accommodation options for the tenant and or applicant. Wentworth recognises the link between housing and community service agencies is integral to creating sustainable and successful tenancies.
- Provision of homelessness services
Wentworth is unique in that it operates a community services team that delivers a range of support services to people who are homeless. Successful under the recent Going Home Staying Home reforms Wentworth is the 'lead agency' to deliver on both the adult homelessness services and tenancy support services in the Nepean Blue Mountains area. Building on the success of our 'Project 40 Supportive Housing' service over the past 3 years, we work closely with the community service system to provide long term housing and support solutions to the chronically homeless, deliver 'rapid rehousing' responses to those recently experiencing homelessness and work with the service system to build its capacity for tenancy support.
- Links to employment
Wentworth has recently participated in an innovative employment pilot project called 'Workfast' to better link people who are homeless or at risk of homelessness to employment outcomes. Working with local Job Service Agencies and Regional Development Australia this project looked at how to better integrate and coordinate these service systems which can all too easily work in isolation to the detriment of the client/tenant.
- Place Based Management – building communities
Wentworth employs a 'Sustainable Communities Project Officer (SCPO), to work with local agencies to rebuild and strengthen the communities in which our tenants live. Managing tenancies in 'whole of location' areas such as the Blue Mountains or in marginalised communities such as Riverstone, this position works with a wide range of community agencies and government departments such as Police and local councils, to address wider issues of social isolation and disadvantage and create vibrant communities for our tenants. The SCPO also works with Job Service Agencies to link tenants into programs within their community under the Welfare to Work Reforms, such as Work for the Dole and those with a disability that need pathways to employment.

- **Social Procurement**

Wentworth's successful 'Social Procurement Commitment' over the past 3 years ensures that tenders for the engagement of contractors for Lawns and Grounds Maintenance include a commitment to employ social housing tenants. This provides tenants with opportunities to work in the communities in which they live and to achieve economic independence and a pathway out of poverty.

The key outcome of Wentworth's approach is that tenants are better able to sustain their tenancies, which in turn means they can participate more meaningfully in the community. Clear evidence of the effectiveness of this approach between housing and support is demonstrated in a Quality of Life survey we conducted as part of our award winning Project 40 supportive housing service in 2013. Improvements to people's health, ability to sustain a tenancy and even employment prospects were all enhanced when permanent housing was linked to appropriate support. Similar programs in the USA have clearly identified the significant savings to the health, criminal justice and welfare systems when this type of approach is employed.

These examples all illustrate the 'value add' of community housing providers, such as Wentworth, in the provision of tenancy management services to social housing tenants. Community Housing Providers are well placed to ensure those tenants whose needs are complex receive the support necessary to ensure they can sustain their tenancies and participate fully in the local community.

I look forward to your consideration of the information contained in this letter to the NSW Legislative Assembly Inquiry into tenancy management in social housing.

If you require any further information please do not hesitate to contact me on [REDACTED] or at [REDACTED]

Kind regards

[REDACTED]
Nick Sabel
Chief Executive Officer