



# HELPING TO END HOMELESSNESS

*Homelessness Week runs from August 6-12, with this year's theme being 'there's always something you can do'. Master Builders director Michael McLean explains what this week is all about.*

**M**OST of us live in good homes and have never experienced homelessness, so it is difficult to imagine what it would be like. The causes of homelessness vary, but the dominant reasons appear to be domestic and family violence, financial difficulties or experiencing a personal or health crisis. For families with a mortgage, homelessness may result from an unexpected job loss or a significant illness. The reality is that homelessness often happens due to unforeseen circumstances, which are compounded when people do not have access to the resources required to assist them and possibly prevent it.

We are fortunate to have a number of organisations which specialise in assisting about 25,000 homeless people each year. A number of these organisations have come together to form a WA Alliance to End Homelessness.

If our society believes that the provision of some form of housing is a basic human right, then we all have a collective responsibility in contributing to ending homelessness.

For many people on low incomes, renting can be a precarious experience. Even when rents are stable, leases may be ended unexpectedly. When rents are more than you can afford, the choice may be between paying the rent, paying for food, couch surfing with family or friends or becoming homeless.

WA has an innovative construction and development sector capable of delivering diverse, affordable homes. Increasing the overall supply of affordable housing is going to be one of the ways we end homelessness in our state.

While homelessness can happen to almost anyone, people on low incomes are at much higher risk of simply not being able to afford to rent or purchase a house. Social housing is a great response to this problem. They are used by some of us when we need some form of support.

In WA we have over 40,000 social housing homes. The WA construction sector has had a

hand in delivering every one of them.

Investment in social housing has a double benefit. It delivers stable, affordable housing for the people in our community who are most at risk of housing insecurity. It also provides a baseload level of housing demand for the property and development sectors.

In the first five years of the state Affordable Housing Strategy 2010-20, around 5400 social housing homes were delivered. The most recent three-year Action Plan promises around 540 social housing homes. While there are a lot of other government-led construction projects underway, it is time for the building, land development, local government and community welfare sectors to come together to suggest innovative affordable housing solutions to the McGowan Government. I'm pleased to report that this is happening, with Shelter WA recently co-ordinating the first meeting.

In a previous column, I outlined a number of initiatives to increase the availability of affordable housing for people experiencing homelessness. These include: re-purposing underutilised government land assets for additional housing supply, enabling housing to be built at low cost and close to services, encouraging local governments to develop and implement affordable housing policies and strategies to enable innovative housing solutions and greater housing choice, and providing greater housing choice along with incentives for industry to partner with the community sector to deliver more affordable, diverse housing supply.

There's always something more, different and better to do to end homelessness. The building industry has always stood ready to do our part in delivering the social housing that our state needs. It's now time for the key stakeholders to develop a plan which will help our governments to end homelessness.

For more information on Homelessness Week, go to [www.shelterwa.org.au/homelessness\\_week](http://www.shelterwa.org.au/homelessness_week).