2014
Social Housing Advocacy & Support Program (SHASP)
Support that works

SHASP Managers Network (Victoria)
September 2014

Contents

1. Introduction

This paper has been developed by the SHASP Managers Network (SMN). The SMN is made up of representatives from all SHASP providers across Victoria and meets bi-monthly. Its key purpose is to share practice wisdom and experiences between providers and ensure that SHASP service delivery practices are consistent and effective.

In mid-2013 the SMN undertook a state-wide data collection to examine various issues including service demand, client demographics and outcomes. The time period examined was the July – September 2013 quarter. A detailed data analysis by SHASP service providers themselves had not been attempted before. A small working group of SMN members was set up to develop a project brief that included a proposed data collection tool beyond the regular data collection.

This paper is the result of that undertaking.
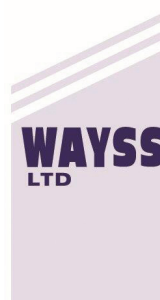
2. Service Context

The Social Housing Advocacy and Support Program (SHASP) is an outreach case management program funded by the Victorian Department of Human Services (DHS) with a current state-wide annual funding of $4.7 million. SHASP focuses on providing support to public housing tenants whose tenancies are at risk and those who need specialised support to establish their new tenancy. Within this aim, the goals are to:

- Identify and address underlying issues which contribute to the risk of tenancy breakdown for the individual or family
- Support tenants to achieve outcomes that lead to successful, sustainable public housing tenancies, the achievement of other life outcomes and engagement in the community
- Reduce preventable exits from public housing
- Prevent homelessness.

Currently there is the equivalent of 38 direct full-time support staff working in the program across Victoria. The program has a combined state-wide target of approximately 2,400 case management episodes per year.

Based on these targets and the total SHASP annual funding the approximate cost per SHASP client is $1,958. In contrast to this relatively modest spend the cost of a tenant being evicted and entering into the homelessness transitional/crisis support sector has been estimated by DHS at $34,000.[1]

SHASP saves tenancies. It also saves the public purse money.

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1   Human Services: The case for change. DHS 2011

3. A new model

In 2012 DHS made a number of significant changes to the SHASP program in terms of its service delivery model and funding. The model was reworked to focus more on case management and less on short term interventions and advocacy. Overall 38% was removed from the program's funding, down from $7.4 million to $4.7 million.

The background to these changes is outlined in the SHASP – Interim Integrated Case Management Guidelines that DHS developed in September 2012:

"Over recent years, there has been a significant shift in the SHASP client profile. Clients are increasingly vulnerable and lack other suitable tenancy support. In addition, the service is working with increasing numbers of single parent families who are at risk of experiencing homelessness.

This change in client profile, combined with changes to funding for SHASP services, has necessitated a move towards a case management approach that enables a more holistic, integrated response to address clients' needs, while targeting resources to those most in need.

The move to a case management approach also aligns with the move towards a personalised, holistic response outlined in Human Services: The case for change. This paper describes an integrated approach to delivering human services, underpinned by case management – Services Connect."[2]

These Interim guidelines and the service targets were due for review in June 2013; though at the point of writing this is yet to be done.

Prior to the funding cuts in 2012, SHASP was independently evaluated by Health Outcomes International in 2009. The SHASP Evaluation Report clearly highlighted the critical link between effective and timely support and successful tenancies:

"The findings have served to confirm the findings of previous reports and reviews; meeting the housing needs of individuals eligible for public housing is about more than "putting a roof over someone's head" Increasingly there are a range of other client issues that must be addressed.

It is often these issues that both contribute to an individual's entry into the public housing system and undermine the success/sustainability of their tenancy. If these issues are not effectively addressed, then the effort expended to place an eligible individual into public housing can be quickly undone.

For many, this will result in falling back into homelessness and perpetuation of the revolving door."[3]

The evaluation reinforces that the best way to resolve housing breakdown and avert homelessness is through the provision of stock *and* support.

2   SHASP – Interim Integrated Case Management Guidelines. DHS 2012
3   Health Outcomes International (2009) Evaluation of the Social Housing Advocacy and Support Program (SHASP) Department of Human Services; Melbourne

4. A system in crisis

The public housing system in Victoria is in crisis. In 2012 the Victorian Auditor General's Office released its report, *Access to Public Housing*, which states:

"Public housing is operating unsustainably and without direction. The Department of Human Services' (DHS) Housing and Community Building Division (the division) has been slow and short-sighted in responding to a changing operating environment.

Despite DHS and the departments of Treasury and Finance and Premier and Cabinet awareness of the problem for at least six years, sustainable solutions are yet to materialise. New directions now being developed through the housing framework must innovate and unlock portfolio value to assure viable public housing in the future."[4]

In 2012 The Victorian State Government also released a discussion paper: "*Pathways to a fair and sustainable social housing system*." A period of consultation followed the release of this discussion paper and services, peak bodies and the community had an opportunity to respond to the paper through a submission process.

In March 2014, the Victorian State Government released its new framework, – *New Directions in Social Housing Framework*. At the same time a group of Victorian housing and homelessness peak bodies[5] released their own paper on the future of social housing in Victoria – *Making Social Housing Work*.

Both of these frameworks focus primarily on housing stock management. Disappointingly little emphasis is placed on the crucial role that support plays in assisting vulnerable Victorians to maintain healthy and sustainable tenancies.

We believe that both stock *and* support are integral to assist vulnerable people to sustain successful tenancies. Later in this paper we explore how SHASP can assist in realising some of the goals set out in DHS's framework.

4   Victorian Auditor General's Office – Access to Public Housing 2012
5   Tenant's Union of Victoria (TUV), Council for Homeless People (CHP), Community Housing Federation of Victoria (CHFV) and the Victorian Social Services Council (VCOSS).

5. Support that works

SHASP has a unique role in the Victorian community sector as the only case management program that focuses exclusively on working with public housing tenants.

Our experience tells us that many tenants require support to establish and maintain a successful tenancy. We also know that there are periods of time when a person may find themselves in crisis whether through experiencing financial difficulties, family violence or some other kind of personal crisis. For many of our clients the line between housing security and housing crisis is easily crossed.

The SHASP Interim Case Management Model focuses on two key support functions – Establishing & Sustaining tenancies;

a) Establishing tenancies

Transitioning from homelessness to being 'housed' can be an extremely difficult journey, especially if the period of homelessness has been a lengthy one. A new property may take people away from familiar places, severing ties with support networks and causing isolation and anxiety. It is the provision of respectful, sensitive & flexible support that is critical for making a house into a home. Dr Guy Johnson, a leading homelessness academic at RMIT refers to the period when people are first housed but not attached to community as "Liminal Space."[6]

Tenants who have been recently housed can be referred to SHASP to assist them to get their tenancy off to a good start. Office of Housing staff can suggest SHASP support at the sign up appointment to tenants who have complex needs or a history of homelessness. This kind of early intervention can mean the difference between a successful or unsuccessful start to a tenancy. This work often leads to better engagement with education and employment, or community engagement.

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6   Liminal space is when you have left the tried and true, but have not yet been able to replace it with anything else. It is when you are between your old comfort zone and any possible new answer. If you are not trained in how to hold anxiety, how to live with ambiguity, how to entrust and wait, you will run…anything to flee this terrible cloud of unknowing. - Richard Rohr

b) Sustaining tenancies at risk

Since the case management model was implemented SHASP's focus has been predominantly on tenancies that are *at risk*. Often SHASP has a very small window of opportunity to assist the client to save their tenancy, which means teams need to be highly skilled in fast and effective engagement. This initial contact period is usually very task based for both parties.

Once the tenancy has been stabilised SHASP begin to work on a deeper level, exploring some of the underlying issues that caused the housing instability and developing strategies to prevent a reoccurrence of these issues. This includes referrals and linkages to a range of mainstream & specialist services such as health care providers, schools, financial services and training and employment providers. SHASP aims to build a network of supports that will continue to assist tenants into the future long after SHASP has support has ended.

As DHS points put in its report – "The Case for Change" saving tenancies and creating strong community support networks has not only benefits to the tenant by keeping them safely housed but also has benefits for the broader Victorian community by saving the costs associated with becoming homeless;

"There is evidence of substantial 'churn' of highly disadvantaged people through the housing and homelessness service systems. Research from 2006 revealed that around 50 per cent of high-risk tenants had held a previous tenancy in publicly funded housing. It has also been estimated that, of the 503 public housing tenants evicted from their property in 2006–07 around 450 (90 per cent) re-presented at crisis and transitional providers within the next 12 months. Supporting each of these 450 evicted tenants through homelessness services was estimated to cost upwards of $34,000 per year in 2006–07, compared to around $4,300 in service costs per year for a household in public housing"[7].

Sarah's story

"I'm a single mum and have been living in public housing for the last nine years. Last year my mum passed away interstate and I fell apart, I relapsed and started taking drugs and drinking again. My housing was at risk; I wasn't paying my rent or keeping it clean.

My housing officer referred me to the SHASP program. Together with my SHASP worker we are putting supports in place for me and I am linking back in with my drug and alcohol service and mental health supports.

I now feel strong enough and in control, my housing is no longer at risk, I am on a payment plan to pay back my arrears. I have even enrolled in a Community Services course and am looking to become a drug and alcohol counsellor."

7   Human Services: The case for change. DHS 2011

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6. Who are SHASP clients?

Referrals to SHASP are predominantly from the Office of Housing. In the 3 month period we examined in our data snapshot, SHASP was supporting 1,021 households across the state.

Once dependents and partners of clients are included, SHASP assisted approximately 2,300 people during this time. Of those households 66% were headed by a female. 39% of households were single parents with children (754 dependents). 41% were single person households.
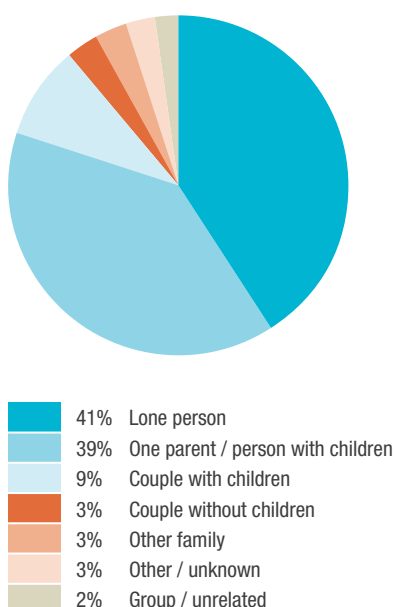

41%	Lone person
39%	One parent / person with children
9%	Couple with children
3%	Couple without children
3%	Other family
3%	Other / unknown
2%	Group / unrelated

Figure 1: Household types

Half of these SHASP clients were between 25 – 45 years old. The majority of clients, 84%, cited a type of government payment as their sole source of income, with only 5% engaged in paid employment. 34% of clients were receiving a disability pension, which indicates a further complexity to their needs.

Case study: Jane

Jane was an older, single person, living alone. She had an Intellectual Disability and significant physical health issues. Office of Housing staff had serious concerns about Jane's welfare, particularly her health. Jane was socially isolated with complex and dysfunctional family relationships that included experiences of family violence. Jane's six cats and one dog lived with her predominately inside the property. This arrangement had resulted in the condition of the property deteriorating significantly. Jane's property also required essential maintenance and modifications to improve accessibility of the bathroom.

Jane was referred to her local SHASP provider. Multiple referrals and actions were made including; securing funding for an industrial clean–up of the property and modifications to the bathroom and referral to HACC services. Jane was also referred to a local education centre. Alternative homes were found for four of the cats. Case conferences were conducted with relevant agencies and the option of moving to an alternative and more appropriate property was offered to Jane.

Once a transfer to an Elderly Person's Unit had been arranged, SHASP coordinated the move and the setup of Jane's new property.

For Jane, support from SHASP meant she was more able to independently manage and maintain her home. She was better equipped to deal with her finances and payments. Jane felt more confident and at ease in her relationship with her daughter. She was linked with ongoing services to manage her health issues.

Jane's tenancy is no longer at risk. Jane is back in control of her home.

7. The Data Snapshot

a) Presenting issues:

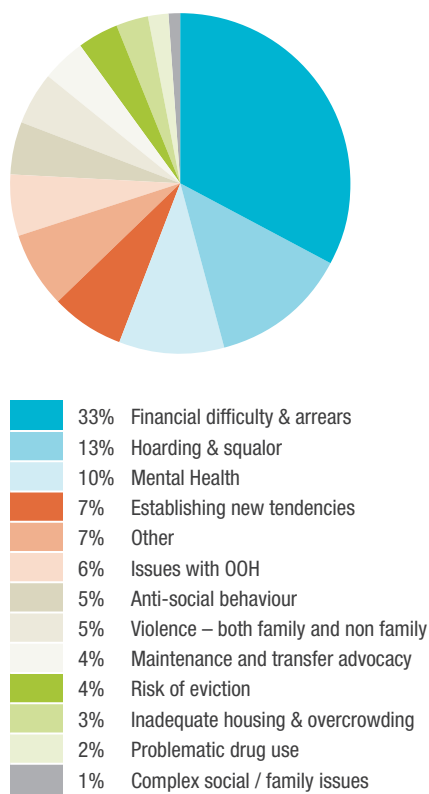|		
■	33%	Financial difficulty & arrears
■	13%	Hoarding & squalor
■	10%	Mental Health
■	7%	Establishing new tendencies
■	7%	Other
■	6%	Issues with OOH
■	5%	Anti-social behaviour
■	5%	Violence – both family and non family
■	4%	Maintenance and transfer advocacy
■	4%	Risk of eviction
■	3%	Inadequate housing & overcrowding
■	2%	Problematic drug use
■	1%	Complex social / family issues

Figure 2: Main presenting issues

In the data collection SHASP staff were asked to select what they considered to be the one *main* presenting issue for each tenant. Our practice experience tells us that SHASP clients commonly experience multiple, complex and interrelated issues, we therefore note that it can be difficult to synthesize a client presentation down to a single issue.

Interestingly anti-social behaviour represented only 5% of main issues, mental health; 10% and problematic drug and alcohol represented just 2%. The most often identified issue was financial difficulties and rent arrears (33%).

Violence; both family and non-family was identified as the main issue for 5% of the clients. Support to establish new tenancies for socially isolated tenants was represented as only 8%, it is likely this figure is higher and included in the 7% of 'other'. Hoarding and squalor issues represented a significant percentage of the presenting issues (13%).

b) Types of support provided:

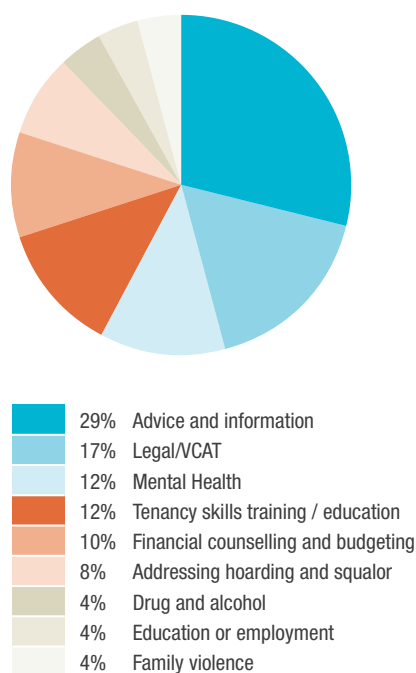|		
■	29%	Advice and information
■	17%	Legal/VCAT
■	12%	Mental Health
■	12%	Tenancy skills training / education
■	10%	Financial counselling and budgeting
■	8%	Addressing hoarding and squalor
■	4%	Drug and alcohol
■	4%	Education or employment
■	4%	Family violence

Figure 3: Nature of interventions, referrals and liaison

Areas of support identified in the data snapshot included tenancy skills training, financial counselling and budgeting, education and employment, mental health, Legal/VCAT issues, drug and alcohol, family violence and information and advice.

The types of work identified by SHASP staff were divided into: 59% – intervention, 18% – liaison with other agencies and 23% – referrals & linkages.

This snapshot demonstrates the essential role SHASP plays in enabling and facilitating tenant's access to specialist tenancy related support *as well as* linkages and case coordination that ensures tenants receive the right type of assistance when they need it.

c) Rent arrears & Outcomes:

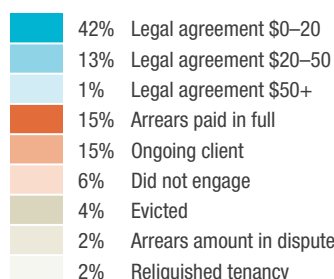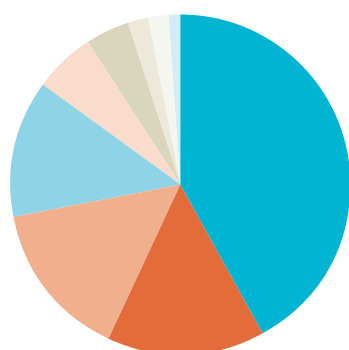|	
42%	Legal agreement $0–20
13%	Legal agreement $20–50
1%	Legal agreement $50+
15%	Arrears paid in full
15%	Ongoing client
6%	Did not engage
4%	Evicted
2%	Arrears amount in dispute
2%	Reliquished tenancy

Figure 4: Outcome of SHASP client rent arrears

A tenant in rent arrears is the most common reason for OoH staff to refer to SHASP. In the three month period of the snapshot, rent arrears was an issue for 38% (387 tenants) of all clients.

Financial difficulties are a key cause of housing insecurity. Eviction has a major economic expense to the tenant, DHS, VCAT, and the broader service system, but the human cost is an even more significant in terms of the trauma, dislocation and marginalisation it causes.

In total, rent owed by those known 387 tenants was $790,839.00. Of that amount, $640,750.00 was owed by tenants in metro regions and $150,089.00 in regional areas.

By the end of the data snapshot period, 73% of those 387 tenants had either paid their rent arrears in full (15%) or had entered into a repayment agreement with SHASP assistance.

Of those SHASP clients with rent arrears only 3% were known to have been evicted at the end of the data collection period.

The DHS's annual report for 2012-2013[8] cited tenants in arrears had risen from $12 to $15.1 million from 2012 to 2013, at the same time as SHASP funding was reduced by $2.7 million. As demonstrated above SHASP can play a key role in assisting tenants to address financial issues and repay arrears. SHASP is a cost effective program that given an increase in funding could further assist in addressing tenant debt. This is a positive outcome for both DHS's financial situation but also for the tenants that receive the support to address not just their financial stress but other underlying issues which in turn reduces future burden on both the service system and the community.

d) Arrears Amounts:

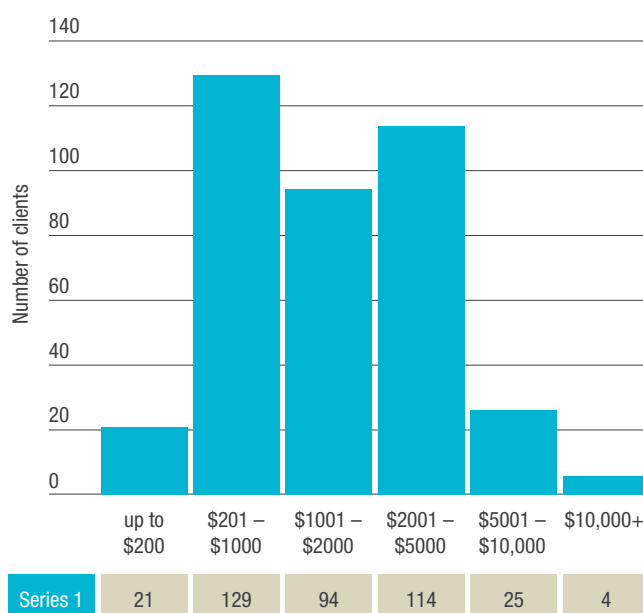|	up to $200	$201 – $1000	$1001 – $2000	$2001 – $5000	$5001 – $10,000	$10,000+
Series 1	21	129	94	114	25	4

Figure 5: Arrears owing by clients

The table in figure 4 identifies the extent by which tenants are in arrears. Early identification of financial stress and referral to SHASP is essential when the arrears are at a level where repayment is manageable. 37% of arrears were $2,001 or more, a challenging amount to repay – on top of existing financial pressures.

e) Outcomes for tenants:

- 60% Maintained current tenancy
- 18% Ongoing client
- 13% Did not engage
- 4% Other, unknown
- 2% Evicted
- 1% Advice / advocacy / negotiation
- 1% Deceased, incarcerated, transferred
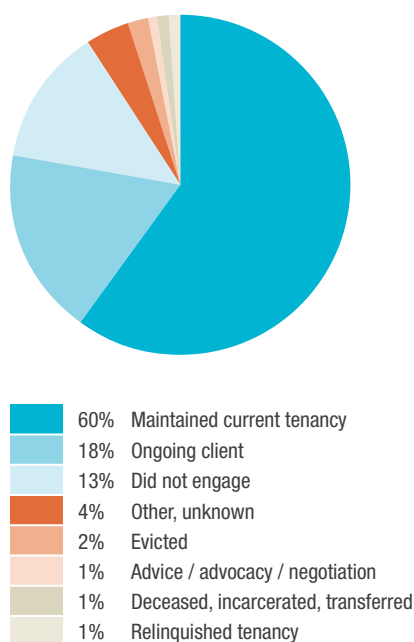- 1% Relinquished tenancy

Figure 6: SHASP client outcomes

The data snapshot identified significant successful outcomes for clients. A vast majority sustained their tenancies (60%) or were still working with SHASP (18%). Only 3% were evicted or relinquished their tenancy. 13% of referrals did not engage.

The 24 known evictions should be compared to those figures released by DHS for 2012-2013 of 304 actual 'forced evictions' and 5,470 applications by DHS for warrants[9]. The demand for SHASP support is clearly demonstrated in these figures and is in line with the New Directions Framework of ensuring support is provided as part of the three strikes policy. Overwhelmingly the data suggests that involvement with SHASP actively prevents eviction.

Case Study: Jenny

Jenny aged in her thirties was referred to SHASP for assistance with addressing rent arrears of $1,113. Jenny has a long history of heroin use which had impacted on her parenting and the stability of her family. She had 5 children. Jenny's youngest son has been diagnosed with autism and Jenny was not sure how to help him.

When two of Jenny's children were removed by Child Protection in 2013, she decided she needed to deal with her heroin dependence. During this period of drug withdrawal Jenny's Centrelink payments were stopped as she had missed several appointments. This meant her rent wasn't being paid. She also got behind with her utilities.

SHASP assisted Jenny to reinstate Centrelink payments and enter into a payment plan with the Office of Housing. SHASP negotiated with OoH and VCAT to establish a realistic payment plan and was also able to clear a previous ongoing OoH debt. SHASP secured a Utility Relief Grant for Jenny, advocated with the utility companies; this included contacting the Energy and Water Ombudsmen.

Jenny was referred to a local training and education provider, who provide free training on how to work with young children with autism spectrum disorder. Jenny's debts and repayments made other payments difficult. SHASP arranged for food vouchers and provided Jenny with other emergency relief contacts.

Jenny is now managing her debts and meeting her payments. She is working with a specialist family service and Child Protection with a goal of having her children return to her full time. Jenny has not used heroin since.

9   https://www.wsws.org/en/articles/2013/11/11/evic-n11.html

Case study: Mike

Mike, a man in his late 40's was referred to SHASP under the Duty of Care protocol. This means the referral was made to SHASP by OoH without his consent on the basis that they held serious concerns about his welfare.

Mike had been living at his property for 11 years. He had a long psychiatric history and the condition of his property was identified as a risk during his admission to an acute Psychiatric Ward. On discharge Mike was being closely monitored by the Community Mental Health team. His property was in a state of significant squalor. Mike wished to clean it himself but lacked the capacity to do so.

SHASP was able to engage with Mike over several impromptu home visits. Eventually he agreed to receive support from the program. The Outcome Star tool was used to help Mike identify areas he wanted to work on. First an industrial clean was done. Liaison with Office of Housing meant that plumbing issues were addressed and other serious maintenance issue resolved. After the industrial clean Mike was able to receive home care assistance from the local HACC agency.

Mike & SHASP developed a budget together so he was better able to manage his finances. Through a donation Mike received his first television and DVD player in decades. He continues to engage with local mental health services for ongoing treatment. Mike reported he was very happy to have the SHASP assistance and is "very happy with his new place".

8. SHASP's service capacity

As part of the SMN's data analysis a state-wide comparison of service targets, staffing levels and the service demand via public housing stock was undertaken.

a) Service Targets

There appears to be no consistent approach to establishing targets per SHASP provider. Targets are agreed at a local DHS level. Quarterly service episode targets varied extensively between SHASP providers regardless of regional or metro locality.

As already mentioned tenants of DHS are becoming increasingly vulnerable. The combined SHASP annual service target is approximately 4% of all DHS public housing stock. This raises questions about the adequacy of the program's current service capacity. With better resourcing the program could see a much higher proportion of tenants.

9. Expanding the reach of SHASP

The number of successful outcomes for SHASP clients proves that the use of case management in the prevention of tenancy breakdown and homelessness is effective. We believe the model could be expanded to include community housing and private rental tenants.

a) Private Rental

A number of SHASP service providers have recently trialled new models of service through the Victorian Homelessness Action Plan. Two such initiatives include STAR Housing (Sustaining Tenancies at Risk) provided by the Rural Housing Network and a collaborative project in Bendigo: Back on Track. Both projects provided case management to private rental tenants at risk of eviction, not dissimilar to SHASP, although with more capacity to address acute financial issues through brokerage. STAR has recently expanded and continues to successfully work with private tenants.

The crossover between public and private tenant issues highlight that working to address factors placing a tenancy at risk is paramount, regardless of the **type of roof** overhead.

Significant recognition has been given around early intervention and prevention of homelessness in all recent papers including *Services Connect*[10], *Service Sector Reform*[11] and *Human Services: The case for change*[12]. Using a Case Management model to maintain and sustain a tenancy is a proven early intervention approach.

Examples of tenancy support service across the private rental sector also exist in other states including the Supportive Tenancy Service in the Australian Capital Territory (ACT), Intensive Tenancy Support in South Australia and Private Tenancy Support in Western Australia.

b) Community Housing

Similarly, tenants living in community housing often experience the same complex issues putting their tenancy at risk. Community Housing includes those in rooming houses and in affordable housing. The Community Housing Federation of Victoria recognises that:

"Early intervention and prevention is greatly preferred by Community Housing landlords rather than a tenancy breaking down. Identification and referral of clients who are in arrears or showing other signs of stress to a program like SHASP would take pressure off homelessness services and ensure a positive outcome for vulnerable and disadvantaged tenants".

10 Services Connect: Better Services for Victorian in need. (DHS2013)
11 Service Sector Reform. A roadmap for community and human services reform (DHS 2013)
12 Human Services: The Case for change (DHS 2011)

10. SHASP's role in DHS's New Directions for Social Housing

DHS's 'Framework for a Strong and Sustainable Future' outlines three strategic directions to guide the reform process.

- **Better communities**
- **Better opportunities**
- **Better assets.**

The SHASP Managers Network has considered areas which SHASP either currently operates or given appropriate financial support could further contribute to achieving these goals.

See table on the following page.

Strategic Directions	Actions	Description	SHASP Does	SHASP Could Do	Discussion
Better Communities	Strengthen our three strikes policy	To tackle antisocial behaviour in public housing to promote a safe and harmonious living environment for residents.	Y		SHASP actively works with tenants who are breached, supports these clients to address underlying issues and provides long term linkages.
	Introduce probationary leases for new tenants	To ensure tenants abided by their responsibilities under the Residential Tenancy Act 1997 (RTA) to respect public housing properties and their neighbours.	Y		SHASP provides case management to establish new tenancies. Statutory obligations are reinforced through all SHASP client engagement.
	Introduce a neighbourly behaviour statement for all tenants	To ensure all public housing tenants understand their obligations and responsibilities under the RTA and their tenancy agreement.	Y	Y	Given appropriate resourcing SHASP could facilitate or participate in information sessions around tenant obligations.
	Implement a tenant engagement framework	To enhance tenant participation in the process of addressing local and statewide issues in the Housing portfolio.		Y	Prior to new model SHASP previously had a tenant participation program. Facilitation or participation would ensure previous model faults are not repeated and new approaches are realistic.
	Establish housing innovation roundtables	To provide stakeholders with a forum to identify opportunities to continually improve the social housing system.		Y	SHASP are well placed due to the extensive history of supporting at risk public housing tenants to participate in roundtable discussions.
	Strengthen housing performance management	To ensure timely and responsive management of public housing.	Y		SHASP regularly works as a conduit between the tenant and OOH, actively working to foster and build the relationship and ensure the tenant's needs are met.
	Trial place management approaches at three sites	To trial new models of delivering integrated management services, including community capacity building, for public housing tenants.	Y		SHASP is firmly integrated into the community with key relationships to build on.
	Trial new models of maintenance and facilities management	To identify and test new ways to provide high quality property and tenancy management services			
Better Opportunities	Establish a new housing assistance website	To provide improved access to better information on housing assistance.	Y	Y	SHASP currently provides information for clients who are interested in moving into private rental, community housing, or other housing options if the OOH property is untenable. This could enhance information on the website.
	Trial Home Connect	To provide support to tenants or applications to fully explore their options to access the private market.	Y	Y	
	Promote and provide rental references to public housing tenants	To assist public housing tenants with good tenancy records to access the private rental market.			
	Trial Work and Learning Brokers	To work with local communities and employers to create more opportunities for people to access work and study.	Y		SHASP regularly provide information, support and linkages in regards to employment or study. Given appropriate resources SHASP case managers are well placed to engage/link tenants with opportunities.
	Expand the house sales to tenants program	To increase opportunities for public housing tenants to purchase selected public housing properties.			
	Simplify the application process for public housing	To provide user friendly application process for the most vulnerable people to apply for public housing.		Y	
Better Assets	Invest $1.3 billion maintenance and upgrades	To extend the economic life of the current public housing stock	Y		Active engagement with SHASP means that clients are less likely to damage their property, and more likely to engage in preventative maintenance at an earlier stage.
	Undertake a strategic divestment, redevelopment and acquisition program	To renew public housing through planned redevelopment, divestment and acquisition			
	Develop regional social housing plans	To plan and manage the future location of public housing stock in regional areas			
	The Director of Housing to consider a strategy for the transfer of stock to community housing	For the Director of Housing to investigate the transfer of public housing stock to the community housing sector.		Y	Prior to new model SHASP provided support to people in community housing. Given appropriate resources the SHASP model could appropriately extend to Community Housing tenants.
	Test the viability of public-private partnership in Social Housing	To consider public-private partnership arrangements for social housing.			Given appropriate resourcing the SHASP model could also support other social housing tenants.

11. Conclusion

We believe that SHASP is a vital service for both public housing tenants and the public housing system itself. SHASP is instrumental in assisting tenants to comply with their tenancy obligations and through this process, explore and consolidate the independent living skills that relate to effectively managing a home. In this way SHASP acts as an *agent of change*, assisting and supporting clients to make meaningful changes to their lives that ensure they are not just able to maintain their tenancy but can further stabilise their lives by accessing specialist or mainstream services and explore training, education and employment opportunities.

With a broad eligibility criteria and an outreach support model, SHASP actively engages and supports public housing tenants through the use of assertive outreach.

We believe that SHASP has more than demonstrated its capacity to work effectively with tenants to get back on track with rental payments (and other tenancy obligations) thus avoiding the considerable costs to Office of Housing of both lost rent revenue and often the additional extra costs of an eviction process. It is arguable that recent cuts to SHASP have placed the public housing system in even more of a precarious financial position than it already was.

In the last seven years SHASP has become an integral service for addressing tenancy insecurity in public housing. SHASP is also the launching pad for linking tenants in with health, community, employment and education agencies. SHASP is also well aligned with the strategic directions outlined in the Services Connect model.

We believe SHASP is an existing platform to further address the risk of homelessness for private rental and community housing tenants and is well placed to implement aspects of the Victorian State Government's – *New Directions in Social Housing Framework*. Our recommendations for the future directions of SHASP are as follows:

12. Recommendations

1. That SHASP funding is reinstated to pre-funding cut levels in light of:
   - the demonstrated positive client outcomes
   - the growing vulnerability of public tenant cohort and the traumatic impacts of becoming homeless
   - the demonstrated ability of SHASP to resolve rental arrears
   - the demonstrated economic benefits of avoiding unplanned exits and evictions from public housing.

2. That DHS and SHASP providers work together to establish realistic service targets that are based on actual staff to OoH stock ratios.

3. That the SHASP client cohort is expanded to include community housing tenants whose tenancy is at risk or those who need support to get their tenancy established.

4. That the SHASP client cohort is expanded to include private rental tenants whose tenancy is at risk or those who need support to get their tenancy established.

5. That DHS and SHASP providers work together to establish realistic service targets for the support of community housing and private rental tenants.

4. That the SHASP Interim Case Management Guidelines be adopted on a permanent basis.