

Homeless White Paper strong on housing, weak on rights: HPLC

MEDIA RELEASE: 22 December 2008

The PILCH Homeless Persons' Legal Clinic (HPLC) has welcomed the federal Government's release of its White Paper on homelessness, calling it one of the most progressive steps taken by Government to tackle homelessness in decades.

Caroline Adler, Manager/Principal Lawyer of the HPLC, said that there was much to praise in the Government's White Paper but urged the Government to go even further in its response to homelessness by incorporating a human rights framework.

'It is exciting to see the Government take such a progressive, multi-faceted and well-resourced approach to the issue of homelessness, with a tangible goal to halve homelessness by 2020', said Ms Adler.

'The Government's commitment of \$6.1 billion, including increased funding for legal services working with people experiencing homelessness, is much needed and recognises that aspects of the law and legal problems contribute to homelessness. The review of tenancy legislation and regulation of tenancy databases announced in the White Paper should ensure that vulnerable Australians are better able to maintain their housing.

'Unfortunately, however, the Government's commitment to legislative review has not gone far enough. Legislation that criminalises homelessness, such as public space laws, and equal opportunity laws that make it lawful for someone to be discriminated against on the basis of their homelessness must also be addressed' said Ms Adler.

'In addition, while the White Paper commits the Government to a response which guarantees that people experiencing homelessness are treated with dignity and respect, it fails to explicitly recognise homelessness as a human rights issue, which is disappointing in light of the Rudd Government's proclaimed commitment to human rights.

'People experiencing homelessness are subject to multiple human rights violations, including: violations of the right to dignity and respect, participation, non-discrimination, privacy, social security, health and, of course, the right to adequate housing. Respect for and realisation of these rights is essential to prevent and address homelessness.

'The White Paper has gone halfway by committing to tangible goals and targets to reduce homelessness, which are fundamental elements of a human rights approach. It is crucial that the Government takes the next step and enshrines human rights, as well as the goals and targets set out in the White Paper, in legislation,' said Ms Adler.

Contact

Caroline Adler, Manager/Principal Lawyer, HPLC
(03) 8636 4408 or caroline.adler@pilch.org.au