

Media Release – 29 February 2008**Homeless Persons' Legal Clinic gives Rudd Government A on homelessness homework**

The PILCH Homeless Persons' Legal Clinic today welcomed the Prime Minister's announcement of an official White Paper to tackle the issue of homelessness in Australia.

"In committing itself to producing a White Paper, the Government has rightly recognized homelessness as a debilitating and complex social issue affecting an increasing number of Australians every year. The community has been waiting for over a decade for such a display of national leadership." said Caroline Adler, Manager and Principal Lawyer of the PILCH Homeless Persons' Legal Clinic.

The Government has convened a high-level steering group, headed by Tony Nicholson of the Brotherhood of St Laurence, to produce the White Paper, which will canvas long-term responses to reduce homelessness in Australia. The Government will also fulfil its pre-election promise to spend \$150 million on crisis accommodation. Ms Adler said that this short-term funding boost is particularly important in light of recent data released by the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, indicating that crisis services turn away over 350 people a day, the majority of whom are women and children.

"It is crucial that as a longer term policy document, the White Paper takes a whole-of-government approach, which recognises the interrelated and complex causes of homelessness. Homelessness is not just about affordable housing supply, it is also caused by poverty, unemployment, family violence and breakdown, mental health issues and substance abuse". Ms Adler was hopeful that this multi-faceted approach would go a long way to ensuring that the human rights of homeless people, particularly in respect of adequate housing and health care, decent employment, and education are met.

Finally, while Ms Adler noted the expertise of the White Paper's steering committee, she stated that it was imperative that the Government recognise and consult with the 'real experts' – people who have experienced homelessness. "Active participation of homeless people in decision making processes that affect them is a fundamental human right. Direct consultation is also far more likely to result in the development and implementation of policies and programs that are targeted, efficient, effective and meet long-term needs".

Established in 2001, the PILCH Homeless Persons' Legal Clinic has provided free legal assistance to nearly 3000 homeless people. Clinics are staffed by pro bono lawyers from private sector law firms and legal departments at eleven outreach locations across Melbourne including crisis shelters, soup kitchens and welfare agencies.

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