**NLAF Housing Law Working Group**

**Report to NLAF – March 2013**

1. **Meeting of the housing law working group**

The following organisations are represented on the working group.

* CLCs (Elizabeth Evatt Community Legal Centre, Kingsford Legal Centre, Macarthur Legal Centre)
* LawAccess NSW
* Law Society of NSW
* Legal Aid NSW
* Tenants Union
* Public Interest Advocacy Centre, including the Homeless Persons’ Legal Service
* Public Interest Law Clearing House NSW
* Mental Health Coordinating Council

The working group met on 29 April 2013 at the offices of the Public Interest Advocacy Centre (PIAC).

**2. Activities / outcomes**

The objectives of the working group are set out in its Terms of Reference. This report outlines the progress of the group towards achieving these objectives.

* 1. ***Identify practices / systems / models of service provision that are successful in supporting vulnerable people at risk of homelessness to maintain and sustain their tenancies*.**

The working group has begun to identify relevant models and practices. Reports and explanations of the programs are being progressively uploaded to the NLAF housing law working group webpage on the NLAF website. Examples include:

* Use of PIAC’s StreetCare videos by Housing NSW to train Customer Service Officers; and
* Identifying and promoting ‘wrap-around’ service-delivery systems that are having a positive practical impact in NSW.

**2.2 *Engage with Housing NSW***

The objectives state that the working group should:

* engage with Housing NSW to develop a constructive working relationship in which to address the housing related legal issues of tenants living in social housing; and
* engage with Housing NSW to facilitate access to assistance (both legal and non-legal) for tenants at risk of losing their tenancy.

The working group is undertaking a detailed examination of the ways in which Housing NSW currently engages with organisations supporting tenants in social housing.

The working group has developed a map that explains the ways in which Housing NSW engages with the community justice sector. The mapping exercise highlights that Housing NSW meets with a range of government and non-government agencies via numerous committees, reference groups and forums.

The working group is considering strategies to engage effectively with Housing NSW given the complex structures that are currently in place for engagement and communicating with Housing NSW. Issues of current concern include housing repairs, the process for termination of lease agreements, and the particular needs of CALD communities.

**2.3 *Housing and Mental Health Agreement***

The objectives state that the working group should:

* Investigate the progress that has been made towards implementing the Housing and Mental Health Agreement.
* Engage with Housing NSW and Health NSW in relation to the implementation of the agreement. For example, participation in Housing and Mental Health District Implementation and Coordinating Committees (DIACCs) and the development of their work plans.

The working group is investigating developments in relation to implementation of the Mental Health Agreement through the Mental Health Coordinating Council.

**2.4 Collect data about tenant experiences and map express legal need**

The working group intends to develop a database of case studies that illustrate:

* the difficulties / barriers / challenges to sustaining a tenancy (including case studies involving CTTT decisions that impact adversely on the continuation of social housing tenancies); and
* successful maintenance of a tenancy, for vulnerable people at risk of homelessness living in social housing (and renting in the private rental market, if it is reasonably practical to collect this data).

The purpose of collecting these case studies is to illustrate to Housing NSW and other key decision makers some of the obstacles that inhibit vulnerable people from staying housed. The working group has agreed that member organisations will collect case studies relating to:

* repairs;
* back dating rent subsidies; and
* termination of tenancies where the procedures and processes for terminating tenancies as mandated by Housing NSW, have not been followed.

**3. Next meeting**

The working group is scheduled to meet again in June 2013.

Ed Santow

**Chair, NLAF Housing Law Working Group**

**CEO PIAC**

**May 2013**