



**Seniors Housing Strategy
Metropolitan & Regional Consultations
Summary Report
August 2016 (updated November)**

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Executive Summary

The Housing Authority, in partnership with Shelter WA, has commenced a series of consultations with seniors' organisations, community services, housing and industry stakeholders and senior housing consumers to inform the development of a Seniors Housing Strategy, which will form part of *the WA State Affordable Housing Strategy*.

The objective of the Strategy is to enable older Western Australians on low to moderate incomes to access and sustain available, affordable and appropriate housing, post-retirement age, so they can age well in the community of their choice.

As part of this project, Shelter WA and Council of the Ageing (COTA WA) co-hosted six (6) consultations¹ with senior housing consumers in Perth (Mirrabooka (two consultations)), Mandurah, Northam, Albany and Bunbury. One-hundred and eighty-seven (187) people participated in the consultations, with fifteen (15) more also participating through phone interviews and discussion.

The objectives of the consultations were to understand the housing needs and aspirations of seniors, and potential gaps in service delivery to this demographic, to inform the development of a Seniors Housing Strategy.

During each consultation, participants were asked to undertake a survey, as well as participate in a World Café² style discussion. Each table was facilitated by a Shelter WA representative, representatives from COTA WA and the Housing Authority. Of the 187 participants, 167 completed the survey, equating to 89% of those attending the consultations.

The current housing needs and future housing aspirations of participants were diverse. There were also a range of views and opinions on how current and future generations of seniors housing needs and aspirations could be met. Overall, the key findings from the consultations were:

- Housing affordability was the most significant and consistent concern articulated in the consultations;
- There was a strong support for dwellings that had two or more bedrooms. One bedroom dwellings were not supported;
- Having easy access to services was a high priority for participants;
- Housing design in the private rental market and in public housing were not seen as appropriate for participants;
- Participants believed universal design should be of greater consideration in seniors housing;
- Having adequate safety and security elements in housing design was of critical concern;
- The majority of participants preferred age segregated communities, with only a few preferring age integrated communities;
- Participants saw public housing as the most desirable future housing option, and many expressed strong views on the management of public housing system;
- The maintenance of properties was a concern for those in public housing and private rental accommodation;
- Being closer to family wasn't always sought by participants;
- Participants consistently said that they wanted to live independently for as long as they could.

¹ A representative from COTA WA was unable to attend the Albany forum.

² The World Café format was not used on 17th or 30th May, with larger discussions groups held at these consultations.

One significant finding from the consultations was that downsizing into one bedroom dwellings was not at all supported by participants. Another significant finding was that the majority of participants wanted to live in age-segregated housing, and not integrated into a mixed demographic community. This is significant for the Housing Authority particularly, as due to the large attendance by those living in public housing or on the wait list, 91.4%, it has potential implications for the future provision of Housing Authority housing.

Due to the large numbers of public housing tenants and wait list applicants attending the consultations, a lot of discussion revolved around the public housing wait list, management and maintenance. Due to the significant public housing focus further consultation with seniors not living in public housing or on the wait list is needed to ensure a comprehensive analysis.

It must also be noted that these consultations only briefly discussed the housing needs and preferences of seniors living with a disability. In 2012, it was estimated that 43% of those over 55 are living with one or more disabilities³. Meeting the needs of seniors living with a disability must be an important consideration in the development of the Seniors Housing Strategy. Seniors who are living with a disability often require:

- Purpose built housing, or modifications to existing dwellings to include universal design elements
- Additional bedrooms for live-in carers
- Easy accessible to services⁴

The extent to which the Seniors Housing Strategy may also meet the housing needs and aspirations of high needs groups is not explored adequately through this survey. Those living with mental health issues, or marginalised groups, such as Aboriginal persons, will require housing and support different to that of the majority of the seniors' population. These groups often require wrap around services to support them to sustain their tenancies, and also other supports to address other issues they may be facing.

³ Australian Bureau of Statistics, 4330.0 - Disability, Ageing and Carers, Australia: Summary of Findings, 2012 (2013)

⁴ Disability Services Commission, www.disability.wa.gov.au/understanding-disability1/understanding-disability/accessibility/, Government of WA.

Introduction

Shelter WA undertook consultations with senior housing consumers in metropolitan and regional locations during May and June 2016 for the Western Australian Housing Authority. The objective of the consultations was to collect information about the housing needs and preferences of seniors to inform future housing policy and the development of a Seniors Housing Strategy for WA.

Shelter WA and Council of the Ageing Western Australia (COTA WA) co-hosted the consultations, with Shelter WA being responsible for organising, presenting, and leading facilitation in each session. The Housing Authority was in attendance at Northam, Albany and Mirrabooka (14th June)⁵ consultations.

Date	Location	Time	Venue	Attendance
17 th May 2016	Mirrabooka	9:00am – 11:00am	Herb Graham Centre, 28 Ashbury Cres, Mirrabooka	37
19 th May 2016	Mandurah	9:00am – 11:00am	Ac-cent Senior Citizens Centre, 41 Ormsby Tce, Mandurah	56
24 th May 2016	Northam	9:30am – 11:30am	Northam Town Hall, Cnr Wellington & Gordon St, Northam	7
30 th May 2016	Albany	9:00am – 11:00am	Albany Uniting Church, 12 Duke St, Albany	25
8 th June 2016	Bunbury	10:00am – 12:00pm	Community Home Care, 3 Parade Rd, Bunbury	38
14 th June 2016	Mirrabooka	9:00am – 11:00am	Herb Graham Centre, 28 Ashbury Cres, Mirrabooka	24
				187

The consultations were promoted to a wide audience; with Shelter WA, COTA WA and Aged & Community Services (ACSWA) sent out information to stakeholder lists. Great Southern Community Housing (Albany) and Foundation Housing also sent out notices and/or directly informed clients of consultations. Shelter WA also placed half page paid advertisements in Albany and Bunbury Community Newspapers, and in *Have a Go* Newspaper, with a distribution of 180,000 per issue throughout Western Australia. The Housing Authority also assisted in promoting the consultations by sending personalised letters to wait list applicants and public housing tenants in locations where consultations were to be held.

The consultations were attended by senior members of the public and followed a World Café format. Each consultation featured a short introductory presentation, followed by small group discussions with focus questions. Throughout the consultation participants were asked to complete surveys about their personal housing experiences. Surveys were also conducted over the phone for those who were not able to attend the consultations. At the forum in Bunbury there were also representatives from the Peel Development Commission in attendance.

It should be noted that of the participants attending the consultations, who provided public housing status, 91.4% were either on the wait list (50%) or currently residing in public housing (41.5%). This is likely due to the personalised letters being the most effective way to encourage attendance. It should be noted that the consultation on 17th May was primarily focused on those in private rental and wait list applicants, and 14th June was promoted mostly to public housing residents. This was undertaken in an attempt to collect more detailed information from these cohorts.

⁵ Housing Authority were requested to attend consultations by Shelter WA following feedback from participants indicating they should be present.

There was a Culturally and Linguistically Diverse representation at the two Mirrabooka forums, with participants bringing family to act as interpreters. Two additional participants required the use of an interpreter service, which was organised by the Housing Authority and conducted by Shelter WA following the in-person consultations.

Key Overall Findings

Housing affordability was the most significant concern brought up in the consultations. Many participants indicated that housing costs were currently a significant financial burden, especially for those in private rentals. 70% of participants were on a Full Aged Pension, with many (39.8%) living in private rental market. The majority of participants also had very little saving for retirement, with 50.8% of participants noting a superannuation balance of less than \$1,000. Many were feeling the stress of high housing costs, especially in regional locations, where housing vacancy rates have not increased and accommodation remains expensive. Many mentioned that affordability of the lower end of the private rental market had not improved. One participant mentioned *“I receive \$706 per fortnight from Newstart and I pay \$640 per fortnight for rent and it is tough going.”*

There was a strong support for dwellings that had two or more bedrooms. One bedroom dwellings were not supported. While many participants in public housing or on the wait list for public/social housing, many were concerned that the properties they might receive would have only one bedroom. Many currently living in one-bedroom public housing dwellings mentioned that they felt these were inappropriate to their needs. The inability to have other participants staying with them, especially family and carers, was the key reason cited for this concern. Not being able to have family stay overnight was causing a few participants to feel isolated.

Having easy access to services was very important for participants. Some participants were concerned that they could only afford housing in areas of poor amenity and that they were unable to easily access health services, and sometimes found it difficult to undertake weekly activities, such as grocery shopping. This was an issue for those in Perth, but more significant for regional locations. Participants unsurprisingly preferred areas of high amenity, giving them easy access to services, and also strongly desired favourable access to public transport. Participants who had easy access to public transport, valued it significantly. Participants without access to services felt socially isolated.

Housing design in the private rental market and in public housing were not seen as appropriate for participants. Participants mentioned that current housing designs in a number of public housing and private rental were relatively poor. A couple of participants mentioned that their bedroom was next to a neighbour’s carport, which meant they were woken up most nights. Others were concerned that it was difficult to bring in shopping from cars as parking bays were not in close enough proximity to housing. Many also believed that housing for participants, especially public housing should include a backyard for leisure enjoyment, and to accommodate pets.

Participants believed universal design should be of greater consideration in all seniors housing. Steps were frustrating for many participants. Some participants were finding it difficult to undertake daily tasks, such as having a shower, due to poor design elements, such as narrow doorways and orientation of amenities. There was concern that poor design could lead to poor health outcomes and injury. For example, one lady living in public housing in Northam indicated that she had to lay on the ground to ignite a pilot light for her hot water system.

Having adequate safety and security elements in housing design was of critical concern. Many in public housing and in private rental mentioned expressed their house didn't have adequate security features. Many lived in neighbourhoods where they felt unsafe. Participants living among other non-senior public housing dwellings expressed concerns about undesirable neighbours, citing anti-social behaviour and crime.

The majority of participants preferred age segregated communities, with only a few preferring age integrated communities. Generally, participants preferred to live in age segregated communities as they either harboured concerns or had bad experiences with younger neighbours in relation to antisocial behaviour, criminal behaviour, illicit drugs, and noise. Other participants felt that they did not fit in with a mixed demographic and preferred to be around people closer to their own age. In contrast to this, some participants either expressed satisfaction with, or desire for an age integrated community. These participants did not want to be separated from the wider community, and believed improved social outcomes were possible through age integration.

Participants saw public housing as the most desirable future housing option, and had strong views on the management of public housing system. It was noted that overall participants expressed a desire to reside in public housing. This was likely due to the large number of public housing tenants and wait list applicants participating in the consultations. Participants on the wait list for public housing were concerned with long wait times for housing, and also expressed concerns about the management of current stock. In this regard, there was a perception that there were vacant properties in metropolitan and regional locations.

The maintenance of properties was a concern for those in public housing and private rental accommodation. Participants living in older public housing were primarily concerned about the current standard and maintenance of their property. Those in newer properties appeared more satisfied. There was widespread dis-satisfaction with long wait times for maintenance for both public and private dwellings, which was causing difficulties and stress for tenants. Participants living in public housing in Bunbury mentioned the outsourcing of maintenance to Busselton and Perth was very frustrating. Many participants living in public housing mentioned that they have or would like to modify existing dwellings to suit their needs, but weren't allowed to do this by the Housing Authority. While many expressed dissatisfactions with their current public housing dwelling, a number of participants in newer public housing seemed particularly satisfied.

Being closer to family wasn't always sought by participants. Some participants had family members living in WA, and stated that they would like to live closer to them. Others mentioned that they did not want to live close to family due to relationship breakdown. For those with family living far away, there was notable concern with having one bedroom dwellings, as this prevented family members and other loved ones from staying over overnight. Some expressed that family had actually decided not to visit as they couldn't afford a night in a hotel/motel, which left the individual feeling downhearted.

Participants noted that they wanted to live independently for as long as they could. This was the second most important issue noted by participants in the survey, although this was not spoken about extensively in the consultations.

Key Survey Findings

Housing affordability is the predominant concern of survey participants. When questioned about their top three housing concerns, 83.7% of participants indicated that affordability was the key concern (see *Figure 1* below). Participants also indicated that they would like to live independently (60.5%) and long term security of tenure (59.3%) rated highly. It must be noted that 'security of tenure' was often confused with safety and security of dwellings, which was discussed extensively in the consultations.

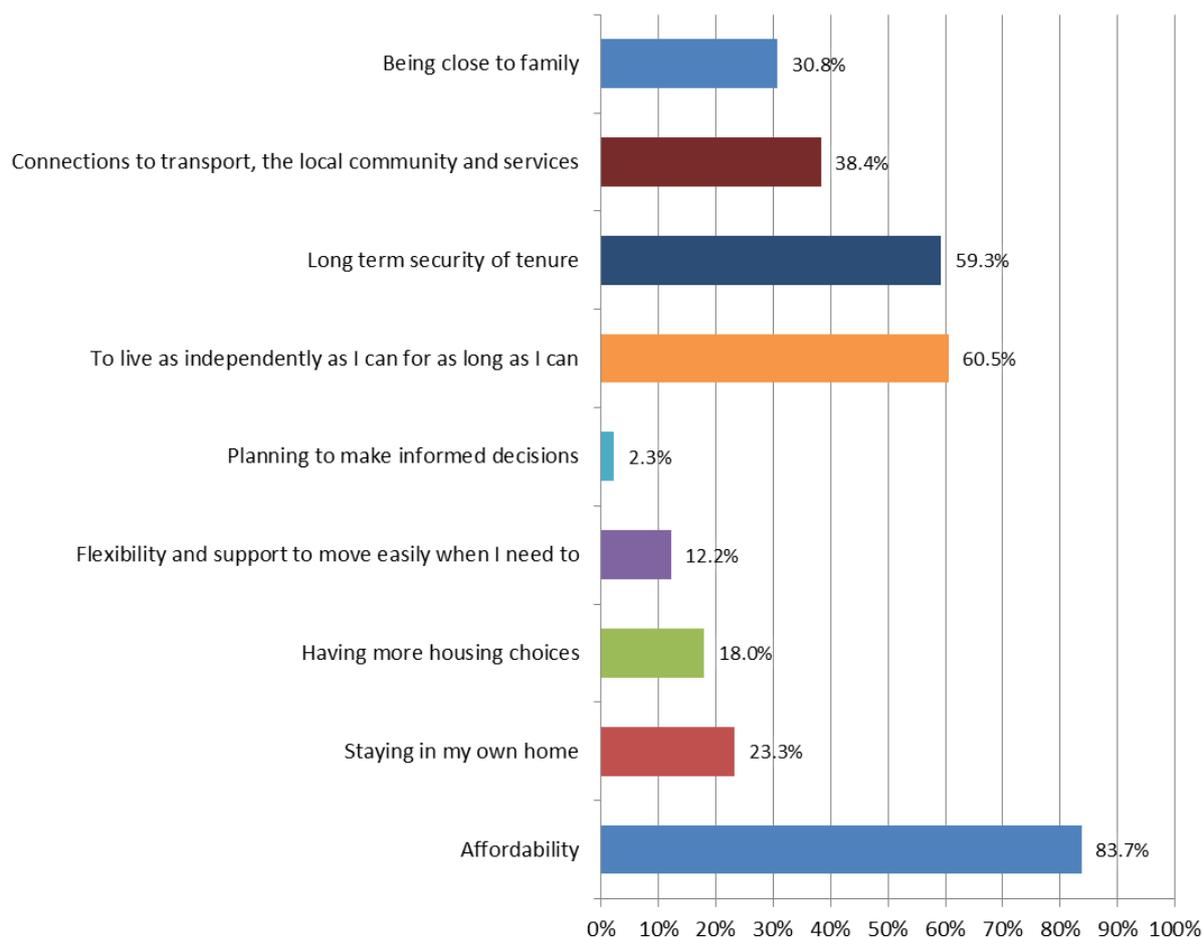


Figure 1: Responses to 'Please mark the three most important housing issues to you'

Interestingly, slightly less than a third (30.8%) considered being close to family as one of the most important housing issues to them. Furthermore, just under a quarter (23.3%) of respondents considered staying in their own home an important housing issue to them. Having more housing choices also ranked relatively low, 18% of respondents.

Participants preference public housing as the best overall housing options, following by living in their own home, with others happy to live where they currently were, as shown in *Figure 2*. Community housing was also considered a good housing option. Private rentals, ancillary dwellings/granny flats, and caravan parks were not preferred by participants. The strong support for public housing may be due to the large proportion of participants on the wait list or currently residing in public housing.

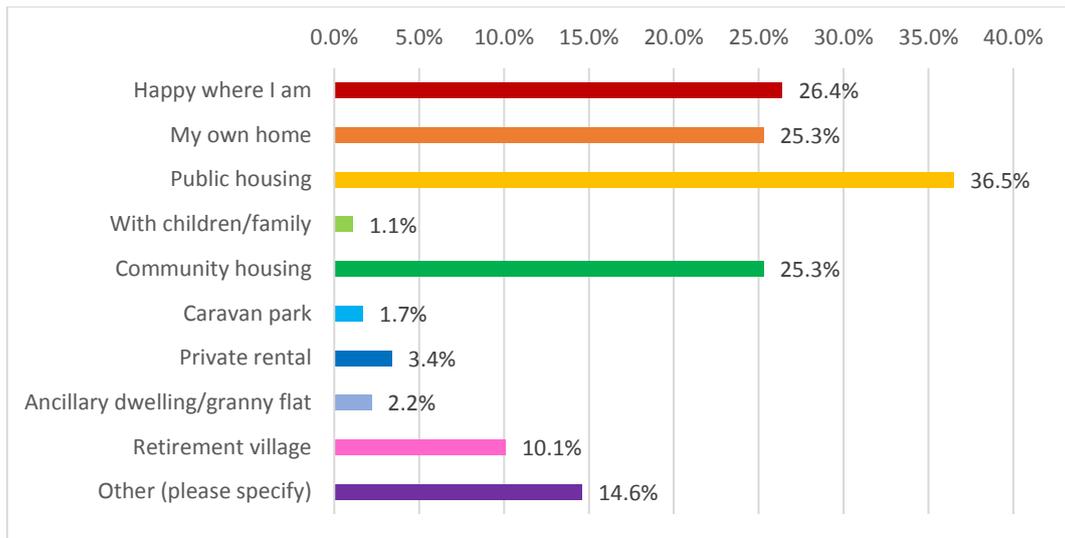


Figure 2: Responses to 'What type of housing would you like to live in?'

Affordability, was a priority with 72% of participants stating they would like to live in housing that was most affordable. Security of tenure was selected by 58.7% of respondents, followed by just under a quarter (24.5%) for availability of support networks. It should be noted that there may have been confusion over the term 'security of tenure'.

Participants believed some form of financial assistance would be best way for them to achieve their desired home. Overall, participants believed more government housing and support was needed to help them achieve their housing preference. Many mentioned that more affordable housing was needed in general, and specifically for seniors. A few noted government assistance could help reduce their housing costs, or enable them to achieve home ownership. For example, one respondent mentioned a 'subsidy (40%) for buying a house' could assist their household, and 'reduced stamp duty' would support another. The inability to obtain finance was brought up a number of times. It seemed that many believed they were too old to even be considered for a loan. There were also some responses relating to amenity, health, and housing choice.

Notably, 58.4% of participants didn't believe their current housing situation will meet their future needs. This is significant as the majority of participants lived in the private rental market. The majority of participants had very little saving for retirement. As *Figure 3* indicates, 50.8% of participants had a superannuation balance of less than \$1,000, and 90% with a superannuation balance of \$50,000 or less. This was concerning with 70% of participants on a Full Aged Pension, 60% of participants were also receiving Commonwealth Rent Assistance. This indicates that many participants are unlikely be able to meet any increase in housing costs, especially with many (39.8%) living in the private rental market, where housing costs have a potential to increase quickly.

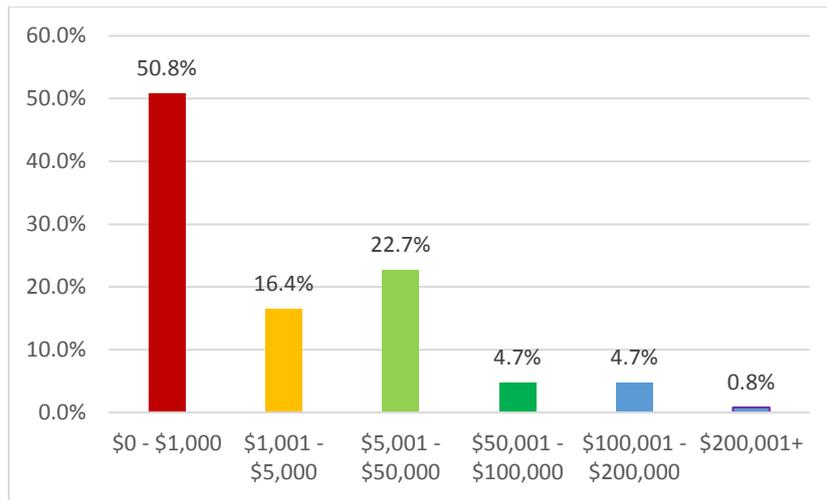


Figure 3: Responses to 'What, if any, is your superannuation balance?'

Unexpectedly, 63% of participants had owned their own home previously. The reasons participants had moved/sold following a period of home ownership were diverse. Unforeseen circumstances had often caused a move, such as financial difficulties and relationship breakdown. These are highlighted in Figure 4.

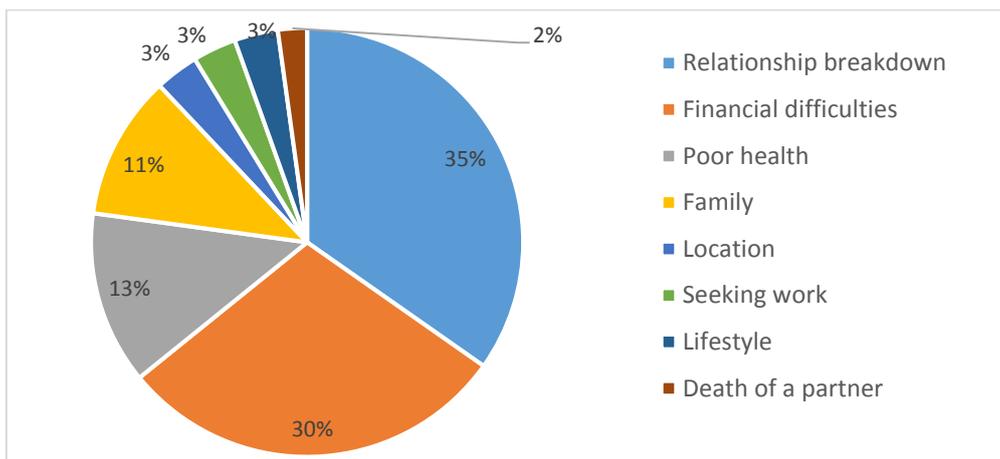


Figure 4: Categorised responses to 'If so, why did you sell/need to move out?' relating to home ownership history

Relationship breakdown was the main reason (38%) why participants sold/moved home after owning their home, followed by financial difficulties (32%), health reasons (14%) and a range of family reasons (12%). There was also some overlap between different factors. For example, unexpected health conditions often placed financial pressure on households, relationships broke down correlated with financial difficulties, and moving to be close to family and health were also related. Participants often mentioned the inability to adequately look after their home as a health reason for moving.

Consultation Specific Information & Issues

Mirrabooka – 17th May (session targeted at private rental tenants and seniors on the public housing waitlist)

Participants attending the forum on 17th May were concerned with ability to access community housing, which was discussed as a favourable housing choice. Some participants mentioned the need for options other than more retirement villages for seniors, which seemed to be the predominant housing type being built for seniors. Retirement villages were seen to be too costly. One participant mentioned the rental system needs to be more appropriate and affordable for seniors. One participant suggested there should be incentives to rent to seniors. Another participant suggested that seniors housing should be a mandatory planning requirement in all large scale developments.

Mandurah – 19th May (session targeted at both seniors in public housing and those in private rentals)

There were a smaller number of participants residing in public housing attending this consultation, with many more residing in private rental. Many participants in private rentals appeared to be on the public housing wait list. Unsurprisingly, only 10.2% of participants were happy in existing housing, compared to 26.4% overall consultation average, and only 22.5% of participants believed that their current housing will meet their future needs, compared to 41.6% overall consultation average. This preference against private rental was consistent with overall survey information, but more pronounced in Mandurah. There was also a much higher proportion of participants who preferred public housing, 63.3% of participants, compared to an overall 36.5% consultation average. Community housing was also seen as a better future housing option in Mandurah than elsewhere, with 49% preferring this compared to an overall 25.3% consultation average.

There was a discussion about how public and community housing should have better design elements, such as undercover carports, and for bedrooms not to be located next to neighbour's driveways, to reduce noise. A large number of participants were concerned about the lack of security in private rental market. Many felt very insecure and vulnerable in their current houses.

Location and accessibility were stronger discussion points during this consultation than in others. Participants noted that while proximity to services and facilities, accessibility, and public transport close to the city centre was good, it was poor and inadequate further out. Coincidentally this is where more affordable accommodation was located. A lack of public transport and walkability led to a feeling of isolation. It was raised that there wasn't adequate consideration for the transport requirements of new seniors housing.

Northam – 24th May (session targeted at both seniors in public housing and those in private rentals)

There were only 7 participants in this forum, leading to potentially inconsistent data between this and other forums. Participants were quite concerned for their security in Northam, noting illegal drug use and associated criminal activities as a reason for needing increased protection. Seniors public housing was seen to be inappropriately located, far from other seniors housing. One participant mentioned that when she needed to move, the costs of moving were a significant burden. She stated the costs of changing utilities over, paying for removalists, and also having enough money for a bond was a concern for her.

The current public housing stock was noted to be of overall quite poor quality in Northam, and this was potentially leading to worsening health outcomes for residents.

Albany – 30th May (session targeted at both seniors in public housing and those in private rentals)

In Albany, participants appeared quite concerned that people in public housing were not treating properties with respect, and causing damage. Participants believed seniors should be prioritised over people who do not look after their properties. The use of illegal drugs and anti-social behaviour was also mentioned. There was also concern raised that disability accommodation was being allocated to people who didn't have disabilities, and many who were using illegal drugs and participating in anti-social behaviour.

Some participants were critical about a group of public housing dwellings which were demolished, and haven't been replaced. Some participants mentioned that these could have been used as a place for people experiencing homelessness to stay.

There were concerns that the private rental market was still very expensive in Albany. Participants indicated that while Perth had seen improved affordability, prices were still perceived as unaffordable in Albany. One person mentioned "every 6 months' rents seem to be going up".

Some participants were concerned that they had made modifications to their public housing dwellings to suit their ageing needs, but at the end of the tenancy the Housing Authority would require them to remove modifications. Participants noted this would be costly, and felt this actually added value to the Housing Authority properties. Some participants felt that housing improvements should lead to incentives for tenants rather than penalties.

There was group discussion about bonds in the private rental market. A few participants mentioned it was difficult to afford an upfront bond, with bond assistance from the Housing Authority often not covering the full bond. It was mentioned that it was difficult for seniors who were waiting on bond acquittals – one lady said she had to wait 5 weeks for the bond to be returned. One person suggested having a transferable bond, which could be moved straight over to the new property, could be an option.

One participant suggested that there was a property available through Keystart that she was interested in, but as she previously owned a property, was ineligible to access this program. This highlighted that there could be changes to programs like Keystart that would enable greater accessibility for seniors.

Bunbury – 8th June (session targeted at both seniors in public housing and those in private rentals)

The Bunbury forum had a high proportion of participants who were living in public housing, 81.1%. Over half the participants noted that they had lived in their current home for more than 10 years, 51.4%. 85.3% of participants believed their current housing met their needs, compared to an overall consultation average of 66.1%. 64.3% of participants also thought their current housing situation will meet their future needs compared to the overall consultation average of 41.6%.

Again, with significant participation from public housing tenants, public housing management was discussed extensively. There were significant concerns with maintenance not being undertaken, with the Housing Authority in Perth dealing with maintenance requests rather than the Bunbury office.

There was a desire from participants for maintenance to be handled by Housing Authority in Bunbury, as it previously was. This was the cause of frustration for a number of participants.

One table discussed how the current frequency of housing inspections made participants feel insecure. These participants felt that 3 monthly inspections were not appropriate for seniors. It was not entirely clear if this was for public, community or private rentals.

Mirrabooka – 14th June (public housing tenants)

This forum was predominantly held for public housing tenants and therefore concerns about public housing management were evident at this consultation.

Communication issues were raised with participants noting they had regularly tried to contact the Housing Authority, but had not been able to get through. For some who had managed to speak to someone, they felt their concerns were not taken seriously.

Participants suggested the Housing Authority should be more transparency in its operations, with lack of clarity on maintenance causing considerable frustration. Undesirable neighbours were also a particular issue in this forum, with participants noting they have had bad experiences with other closely located public housing tenants, including anti-social behaviour, crime and drug use.

Lessons Learned

Throughout the consultation process Shelter WA accepted feedback from participants and the Housing Authority to improve the consultations for both Shelter WA and those who participated. Many lessons were learned, particularly in relation to the facilitation of session, and promotion of events, particularly to seniors which have different needs to other demographics.

Overall the consultations went very well, with strong participation in all except Northam. A key lesson learned was holding them in seniors' centres was valuable to encourage attendance. The consultations held in the Mandurah Seniors Centre had the largest attendance. Shelter WA held other consultations in locations where seniors were likely to frequent, which led to the overall attendance success.

Another key lesson was letters sent from Housing were crucial in getting participants to attend. As many participants do not have email address, or lack computer proficiency, distribution of the letters provided an alternative means to advertise the consultations through print. Advertising the events in local and state-wide newspapers did not appear to be as effective. More resources could potentially be put into mailbox drops in the future, as another way to encourage attendance.

Promoting the Forums as a morning tea was well received, as it helped create a relaxed atmosphere and made the event more appealing, rather than calling it a 'consultation'. The World Café method of facilitation was also seen as the best way to encourage participation. Participants seemed a lot more comfortable speaking about their views in front of a small than a large group, which the World Café encouraged.

As stated in the report, participants wanted the Housing Authority to be present to ensure participant's views and opinions were heard. Initially it was thought that participants may be more reserved if the Housing Authority was present, but this was not the case. It is recommended that a local Housing Authority representative and an officer involved in the development of the Seniors Housing Strategy both attend consultations.

One issue identified in the consultations, and survey results, was that use of language needs to be appropriate for participants. It seemed participants were often confused with the term 'security of tenure'. Some understood the term as it was intended, in relation to the ability to stay securely in dwelling for as long as needed, but others mistook it to mean safety features of a dwelling. Further research should, as best as possible, differentiate between security of tenure, and safety features of a dwelling.

As discussed previously, the consultation and survey only briefly captures information relating to the housing needs and preferences of seniors living with a disability. In 2012, it was estimated that 43% of those over 55 are living with one or more disabilities, therefore a significant proportion of the seniors' population. The housing needs and aspirations of high needs groups were also not adequately explored. These are both significant shortcomings of the research.

Overall, participants were engaged and sought further opportunities to participate. Many indicated that they would like to be informed of the progress of the Seniors Housing Strategy, and/or receive newsletters and updates from Shelter WA.