



Hon. S.F. McGurk, MLA
Minister for Child Protection; Women's Interests;
Prevention of Family and Domestic Violence; Community Services

8th Floor, Dumas House
2 Havelock Street
WEST PERTH WA 6005

30 June 2020

Dear Minister McGurk,

Firstly we would like to thank you for the excellent job both you and the Western Australian Government have done so far during this time of crisis. The leadership your Government has displayed to ensure the health and safety of the Western Australian community has been greatly appreciated.

The Churches of Western Australia have always sought to stand with the most vulnerable in our community to ensure that no-one is left behind. Unfortunately, there are still some people who have been left exposed to greater vulnerability due to COVID-19. For this reason, we are writing to express our continued concern for people experiencing homelessness in WA.

It has been great to see your Government take a lead on addressing homelessness and the shortfall in social housing. We welcome the \$150 million Housing Investment Package, including the provision for 500 new social and affordable homes, as well as the recent \$319 million social housing economic recovery package. We also gratefully acknowledge the \$71.8 million funding increase to homelessness services that was agreed upon late last year. We greatly welcome this commitment and other important actions you have taken as part of WA's first 10-year homelessness strategy.

We sincerely thank you for these commitments and hope that there is continued investment in this area in order to close the social housing gap and ensure everybody has a home. However, the extra pressures of the COVID-19 crisis mean there are still points of pressing concern.

The care agencies of the Churches of Western Australia are advising us that an emerging welfare crisis is looming. We recognise the efforts made to reduce the COVID-19 risks and related health impacts on the sector, however we also know that many services are already stretched and we are eager to prevent a secondary health and social crisis. Following feedback from our care agencies, we therefore request the following measures:

1. Emergency resourcing to ensure the health and welfare of those experiencing homelessness before and during COVID-19, starting with the housing of all rough-sleepers.

As you are aware, during COVID-19, there has been evidence of an increase in the number of people who are experiencing homelessness. We welcome the announcement of the accelerated Housing First initiative in Bunbury and five other areas and request that this is **urgently extended across all key localities with an expanded financial**

commitment to meet the increased demand. Acting now to house rough sleepers can kick-start progress towards ending all rough sleeping. For this reason, we ask for immediate resourcing and collaboration to urgently house rough sleepers.

2. Increased investment in services and housing beyond September 2020 (post-Government welfare payments).

There are rising concerns that when the Federal Government's emergency relief measures expire, there will be a surge in demand for community services, particularly homelessness services. We are keen to see the WA Government act early to prevent a secondary health and social crisis. For this reason, we ask for consideration of additional investment in housing and homelessness services to help alleviate this expected issue.

3. A coordinated communication strategy between the Government and Housing & Homelessness Sector working together collaboratively.

We welcome the proactive establishment of the Homelessness Taskforce "to raise the issues and risks for people experiencing homelessness as a result of COVID-19 and to help develop strategic responses and solutions"ⁱ. We hope that this can be a model for ongoing collaboration and communication between the sector and the Government and **ask that this taskforce be embedded across government to include other streams such as Mental Health and Health to maintain a responsive and coordinated approach into the future.**

Through our faith in Christ, who calls us to love our neighbour and tend to the needs of the poor and vulnerable, we are deeply concerned about the welfare of people experiencing homelessness. The risks of COVID-19 for this very vulnerable section of the community weigh upon us heavily as we head into winter.

As the WA economy builds recovery after the impacts of COVID-19 we ask **that the WA Government prioritises investment in immediately housing rough sleepers and providing more homelessness and housing support services to compliment the social housing commitments made by your Government.**

We look forward to working effectively with the WA Government to help tackle this issue of homelessness within our community.

Yours faithfully,

**Rev Steve Francis, Moderator, Uniting Church
Western Australia**



**Brad Potter (Major), Divisional Commander, WA
Division, The Salvation Army Australia Territory**



David Tehr, Clerk, WA Regional Meeting, The Religious Society of Friends (Quakers)

**The Most Reverend Kay Goldsworthy AO, Archbishop of
Perth and Metropolitan of the Province of Western
Australia**



**The Most Reverend Donald Sproxton is Auxiliary Bishop in
the Catholic Archdiocese of Perth in Western Australia**



ⁱ <https://www.shelterwa.org.au/covid-19-taskforce-on-homelessness-reformed/>