This is my last report as Executive Chairperson of the Housing Appeals Committee as I leave the position in September 2013.

I am taking the opportunity to reflect on the history and achievements of the HAC over the 18 years since the Committee was established in 1995. I feel very satisfied with HAC’s role in the social housing system: we have given clients the opportunity for independent review of decisions, and contributed to building the fairness and capacity of the social housing sector.

From June 1995 to June 2013
• HAC received 7,750 second level appeals;
• 7,050 appeals proceeded to a hearing with a detailed outcome report;
• 37.7% of all appeals resulted in a change of decision recommendation;
• Most appeals were from metropolitan clients and most were about priority housing decisions.

It is interesting to see the trends for the major appeal issues over our 18 years. Of particular note is the consistently high (but varying) percentage of priority housing appeals, and the lower (and now declining) percentage of transfer appeals. This reflects the trend for the majority of appeals to come from applicants rather than tenants: 77% this year and 85% last year.

What has driven appeal trends and volumes over the years?
Most appeals are from applicants unable to secure suitable or affordable private rental housing. Affordable housing for people on low incomes is increasingly difficult to find, and social housing supply cannot match demand. This pressure is most acute in metropolitan areas. Over the past decade we have seen housing affordability issues spread from inner city areas, to middle ring, and now outer ring, suburbs. This is reflected by a greater proportion of appeals now from people in Western Sydney than from inner or middle ring suburbs.

When the demand for housing outstrips supply so starkly, decision making about giving priority to people seeking urgent social housing of necessity becomes more tightly focused. Policies have become more precise, and expectations of what applicants can do to meet their own housing need in the private rental market have increased. Appeals often result from those people who face particular difficulties negotiating their way through the housing market: large families, people with disabilities and those needing particular locations for health or service support reasons.

Interestingly, we have never observed a strong correlation between poor decision making and appeals. The key driver to appeal is desperation for a housing solution. It is in fact more likely that clients will appeal when they are fully advised of their appeal rights by good decision makers. That is not to say that incorrect or unfair decisions are not made, but sometimes these are subtle matters of what weight is given to key information in making a decision, an error in policy interpretation or a mistake in the facts. In these cases, feedback from the Committee enables improved training of staff or clarification of policy to avoid future misinterpretation, to the benefit of all clients and not just the appellant in the case.
Table 1: Total appeals 1995-2012

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Years</th>
<th>Appeals Received</th>
<th>Appeals Heard</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>95-96</td>
<td>600</td>
<td>500</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>96-97</td>
<td>500</td>
<td>400</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>97-98</td>
<td>400</td>
<td>300</td>
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<td>05-06</td>
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<td>07-08</td>
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<td>08-09</td>
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<td>10-11</td>
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<td>11-12</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12-13</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2: Priority housing and transfer appeals as a proportion of the total 1995-2012

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Years</th>
<th>Priority Housing</th>
<th>Transfer</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>95-96</td>
<td>80%</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>96-97</td>
<td>70%</td>
<td>30%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>97-98</td>
<td>60%</td>
<td>40%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>98-99</td>
<td>50%</td>
<td>50%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>99-00</td>
<td>40%</td>
<td>60%</td>
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<td>00-01</td>
<td>30%</td>
<td>70%</td>
</tr>
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<td>01-02</td>
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<td>80%</td>
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<td>02-03</td>
<td>10%</td>
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<td>0%</td>
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<tr>
<td>11-12</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12-13</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
From the Executive Chairperson

The HAC operates with stringent quality control and high standards of timeliness and transparency.

Members since 1995

Our members provide the backbone of a strong and credible appeals process. More than 40 committee members, from a wide range of backgrounds, have been appointed to the HAC since 1995, working effectively and harmoniously to hear and resolve appeals. Members hear cases that are often challenging, and they speak with and respond to the issues for clients who may be highly distressed or difficult. A feature of the Committee has been a great stability in the membership, showing their considerable commitment to the role. Some members have been with the Committee since its inception. The extraordinary breadth and depth of experience, and the accumulated housing appeal specific knowledge of our members, has meant that we can be confident of our expertise and credibility.

Standards

The HAC operates with stringent quality control and high standards of timeliness and transparency. Each year we report on our success in meeting benchmark targets for timeliness in hearing appeals and in providing reports on outcomes to clients and housing providers. We set great store in excellent client service and meeting our own standards. Over the history of the HAC we have heard most appeals within 4 weeks of receiving the housing provider file, and often much faster. We have also achieved our benchmark of providing outcomes to clients within 14 days in the great majority of cases. In some cases, for matters identified as particularly urgent, we provide the written outcome within one day.

HAC achievements include:
• Consistently high standards in administration, hearings and outcomes
• A professional & thoughtful hearing process in all cases
• High client satisfaction; a low level of complaints
• Effectiveness in gaining positive outcomes for appellants
• Help in creating a better social housing system for clients
• Managing well despite constant change in the housing environment
• Training many hundreds of housing provider staff & managers
• Building effective relationships with housing providers across NSW
• Well regarded Community Agency Forums in 7 major NSW locations since 2006, reaching thousands of support agency workers and advocates
• Numerous presentations to community and inter-agency events, conferences and forums
• Prioritising the Aboriginal client information strategy
• Developing the National Housing Appeals Network and conferences
• Mentoring the Northern Territory appeals agency and training NT Housing staff
• Development of our own website, video, Good Decision Making training

Impact of the HAC on housing providers
• Clarify decisions and promote openness of policy
• Encourage clear and comprehensive policy & procedures
• Improved understanding of discretionary decision making principles
• An improved 1st level appeal process with reasons for decision to clients
• Skill and knowledge enhancement of staff in decision making and appeals
• Respect for the appeals process and the right of clients to use it

What it has meant for clients to have the HAC
• Being properly heard about important issues affecting them
• Being encouraged to use their appeal rights
• Given thorough and quick results to appeals
• Many decisions changed – over 35% of all appeals
• Many referrals for other solutions
• Intervention to resolve disputes
• Efficient and informative staff attention
• Mistakes found = changes for future clients

The future
The past is something for us all to be proud of. Our future is exciting too. Over the coming year we will see some new directions and consolidation of continuing work:
• Implementing the HAC Charter and revised policy, procedures and jurisdiction
• Establishing relationships with the new FACS District structure
• Developing community housing appeals usage
• Expanding our role with Aboriginal housing providers and Aboriginal clients

Many thanks
My time as head of the HAC has been very special in a career that has included many interesting and challenging times. There are very many people to thank from within the HAC and externally.

The HAC staff have been exceptional: hard working and committed, all day and every day, from the beginning. They carry an, at times, impossible workload, manage the frontline contact with often demanding clients, and keep the tight schedule from appeal lodgement through hearings to reports and feedback running like clockwork. Their contribution has extended to training the sector, organising public information forums and introducing new technology and office systems as the work of the HAC has grown and become more complex.

The committee members, who give their wisdom, analytic minds and passion, have created a credible and effective agency. Of particular mention are the Deputy Chairperson Lynn Houlahan, former Deputy Chairperson Jenny Ciantar, and the three other presiding chairs, Stamatia Stamatellis, Bronwyn Richards, Tacye Bowen who maintain the high standards of the HAC decision making.

Housing NSW has provided strong and unceasing support to the HAC and the appeals model in place in NSW, despite pressure on budgets over the years which may have made appeals an easy item to cut. The commitment of the Department to improved decision making and transparent policy and procedures has come from the very top and been sustained throughout the organisation. Without this the HAC would have been ineffective.

More recently, community housing providers have embraced the role of the HAC and the importance of the appeals process to their clients. Housing providers have listened to our feedback, sought out the training we can provide and engaged with us in the development of fair and workable policy. It has been a very valuable partnership at all levels and will continue to be into the future.

The success of HAC owes a lot to the help of advocates, support agencies, peak non-government bodies and other government agencies and tribunals. These groups advise people of their appeal rights and help people to appeal. We have had many effective and productive partnerships, with a strong focus on client service.

I feel very fortunate to have been involved for so long in work where I can be sure we have genuinely made a difference. Even if clients are not successful in their appeals, they benefit from being heard and directed to other forms of support. The whole social housing system has improved due to the work of the HAC and of that we can be very proud.

Lynden Esdaile
Executive Chairperson

Pictured above: HAC Committee members from back row from left Peter Davidson, Jill Moir, Lynn Houlahan, Nick Illek, Anny Druett, front row from left: Blanch Lake, Alan Clarke, Neva Collings, Julie Hourigan Ruse, Lynden Esdaile, Rebecca Gleson, and Tacye Bowen.
From the Registrar: HAC performance review 2012-13

The HAC received 597 appeals this year. 54 cases did not proceed to a hearing: they were resolved at first tier or were non-appealable matters that staff forwarded to the relevant jurisdictions, including the CTTT, or the housing provider for complaint, feedback or problem resolution.

543 appeals were heard, an increase of 25% on last year. In 2011/2012, there were 434 appeals heard, which was a 23% increase on the previous year (355 appeals heard). Over two years that amounts to a 53% increase in appeal numbers.

Some key statistics for 2012-13:
- 29 appeals were from Aboriginal clients, only 5% of all appeals heard
- Up to 50% of all appellants identified as CALD clients.
- 32 community housing cases represented 6% of the total

Community housing

The appeals heard about community housing decisions have remained relatively steady over the last 3 years. The dominant appeal issue continues to be rental subsidy.

This year community housing appeals were mostly from clients living in metropolitan areas of Sydney (27) with a very low number from regionally based clients (5).

Table 3: Community Housing appeals by issue: total 32

- Rental Subsidy: 25%
- Succession of Tenancy: 19%
- Transfer: 16%
- Absence from dwelling: 9%
- Additional Occupant: 6%
- Housing Register: 6%
- Housing Register Eligibility: 3%
- Offers of Accommodation: 3%
- Priority Housing: 3%
Table 4: Housing NSW appeals by issue 2011-2012

- Priority Housing: 54%
- Offers of Accommodation: 4%
- Rentstart: 7%
- SAS - D: 9%
- Succession of Tenancy: 11%
- Transfer: 4%

Other Issues:
- Absence from dwelling: 0.25%
- Former Tenancy debt: 2.48%
- Locational Need: 0.74%
- Property Modifications: 0.74%
- SAS - S: 0.74%
- Housing Register: 0.18%
- Locational Need: 0.18%
- Property Modifications: 0.18%
- SAS - S: 0.18%
- Tenure Category: 0.18%
- Rentstart: 0.5%
- Additional Occupant: 1%
- Former Tenancy debt: 1.6%

Table 5: Housing NSW appeals by issue 2012-2013

- Priority Housing: 44%
- Offers of Accommodation: 11%
- Rentstart: 9%
- SAS - D: 9%
- Succession of Tenancy: 10%
- Transfer: 4%

Other Issues:
- Housing Register: 0.18%
- Locational Need: 0.18%
- Property Modifications: 0.18%
- SAS - S: 0.18%
- Tenure Category: 0.18%
- Rentstart: 0.5%
- Additional Occupant: 1%
- Former Tenancy debt: 1.6%
- SAS - D: 7%
- Housing Register Eligibility: 10%

From the Registrar: HAC performance review 2012-13
In comparison to last year, the HAC has seen a significant shift in the types of decisions people are appealing at second tier. Priority housing appeals have decreased as a percentage of overall appeals, with rising numbers of Private Rental Subsidy (formerly Special Assistance Subsidy), Offers of Accommodation, Rental Subsidy and Recognition as a Tenant (formerly Succession of Tenancy) matters.

The increase in Private Rental Subsidy (PRS) appeals follows the state wide PRS review undertaken by Housing NSW. The increase in numbers of Offers of Accommodation appeals is largely driven by the PRS review. A person approved for priority housing and assisted with a subsidy to remain in the private rental market for some years may face cancellation of PRS, rescinded approval for Priority Housing and removal from the Housing Register if they decline an offer of social housing accommodation. The seriousness of these decisions led Housing NSW to introduce a new accelerated appeals process in March 2013. This process automatically escalates unsuccessful 1st tier appeal cases to the HAC for a final review.

Appeals about Rental Subsidy decisions have increased dramatically, as have appeals about Succession of Tenancy - now coming under the new policy called Recognition as a Tenant. See Table 5.

### Table 6: Appeals by Region and Area

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Appeal Region 2012-13</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Greater Western Sydney</td>
<td>43%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Central Sydney</td>
<td>39%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Northern NSW</td>
<td>7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Southern and Western Community housing</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HCC</td>
<td>1%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Looking at Metropolitan Sydney appeals heard:

#### Greater Western Sydney by Area
- Mid Western Sydney: 8%
- Outer Western Sydney: 9%
- South Western Sydney: 16%
- **Great Western Sydney total appeals**: 43%

#### Central Sydney by Area
- Eastern Suburbs: 6%
- Southern Suburbs: 13%
- Northern Suburbs: 8%
- Inner City: 6%
- Inner West: 6%
- **Central Sydney total appeals**: 39%
43% of all appeals were from people living in Greater Western Sydney Region, comprising 18% from Mid Western, 16% from South Western and 9% from Outer Western. Appeal matters varied widely within the region. Almost two thirds of the appeals in Mid Western and South Western Sydney were about priority housing, whereas most of the appeals in Outer Western Sydney, nearly one third, were about Succession of Tenancy. The shift of priority housing appeal matters to Mid Western and South Western Sydney has been a steady trend over recent years, as private market rents increase and housing availability tightens in these areas.

39% of all appeals related to Central Sydney Region, and most of these (13%) were Southern suburbs. Nearly two thirds of appellants in this area were seeking priority housing approval, and only one case related to a request to succeed a tenancy. Looking at the same data for the Eastern Suburbs, one third were seeking priority housing assistance and one fifth requested an appeal about succession of tenancy (now known as Recognition as a Tenant). The Inner City area also had an increase in appeals from household members seeking recognition as a tenant after the tenant died or left involuntarily. This trend is evident in areas of high cost/low vacancy private rental housing, with well established transport, medical and other essential services.

Of all the priority housing appeals in Central Sydney, 34% of appellants received a positive outcome following their HAC appeals. All of the 16 succession of tenancy appeals were declined. In these cases the Committee referred the appellants to other services or products to assist them to transition into the private rental market.

Appellant categories: applicants, tenants and former tenants

Clients are entered into the HAC data systems under the following categories at the time of their appeal and as they relate to the appeal issue:

- Applicant
- Tenant
- Former tenant

The appeals heard in 2012/2013 were as follows:

- 77% from applicants
- 16% from current tenants
- 7% from former tenants

Former tenants are generally appealing their eligibility for housing, related to a former debt or tenant classification at the time their previous tenancy ended. 56% are successful in regaining a place on the Housing Register. This is a higher than average rate of recommendation and may be indicative of the fact that end of tenancy decisions are often made after the tenant has gone and the second level appeal gives the appellant an opportunity to provide information not available to the original decision maker. When looking at those former tenants appealing their priority housing eligibility, the recommendation rate is lower, with only 37% achieving a successful outcome. This is still higher than the average recommendation rates across all categories.
Who are our clients

Single parents

There were 101 appeals heard from single parents, with the youngest only 20 years of age at time of appeal. 55% of all single parents who appealed to HAC were seeking priority housing. They were almost all female heads of the family unit.

Single appellants

More than half of all single appellants were English speaking, with nearly equal numbers of females and males. CALD appellants were more likely to have additional people or children in their households.

• Of the 232 English speaking background appellants, 61% were single, with more females than males
• Of the 293 CALD appellants, only 37% identified as single, with nearly equal numbers of female and male
• Of the 29 Aboriginal appellants, 59% were single, and more than half were female

Gender and ethnicity

• CALD appellants were equally represented by females and males
• Aboriginal appellants were mostly female, with only 6 appeals from male Aboriginal clients
• Those that were categorised as English speaking had a higher representation of females appealing to the HAC (34% more females than males)

Culturally and Linguistically Diverse (CALD) clients requested interpreters across 29 different language groups with their place of origin covering 45 nations worldwide.
Gender and age

312 appellants were female, which represents 57% of the total appeals heard, surprisingly exactly the same percentage as the previous year. The top three appeal issues for female and male appellants were:

**Females**
1. Priority Housing
2. Rental subsidy
3. Offers

**Males**
1. Priority housing
2. Transfer
3. Succession of tenancy

Looking at gender, the following household compositions were evident: See table 9.

As identified when looking at single person and single parent households these are the most common household compositions for female appellants. For male appellants, most household types were singles, followed by couples with children. Only 19 men identified as single fathers with full custody of children.

**Women: single parent families**

There were 15 female single parents who presented with complex appeal matters involving more than one issue and multiple decisions at review. Of these, there were four who had large numbers of children in their care. Female single parents had on average 3.5 children in the household.

**Young people**

16 appellants were 25 or younger. The two young male appellants were both seeking to succeed the tenancy they were residing in at the time of appeal. Of the 14 young females, six were seeking priority housing, six succession of a tenancy, and a further two a transfer.
Clients 65 years of age and over
There were 138 appellants aged 65 and over, with significantly more males than females in this age group (83 to 55). 37% of males and 42% of females in this older age group were appealing priority housing decisions.

Ethnic category, gender and priority housing
An interesting finding emerged in looking only at clients who appealed priority housing decisions. Amongst CALD appellants seeking priority housing, there was an equal number of males and females (81 and 80). This was not the case for English speaking or Aboriginal clients. In both of these groups there was an over-representation of female appellants seeking priority housing (for English speaking appellants nearly 2:1, and for Aboriginal, 5:1).

Most appeals about priority housing were lodged by CALD appellants. For the remaining ethnic categories there was a broader mix of appeal issues, and priority housing was not a dominant issue.

CALD, language groups and use of interpreters
Up to half of all appellants identified as CALD clients. Of these, 59% required an interpreter, slightly lower than the previous year. CALD clients requested interpreters across 29 different language groups with their place of origin covering 45 nations worldwide.

The most common languages requested by appellants for interpreting services:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Language</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Arabic</td>
<td>38%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assyrian</td>
<td>13%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mandarin</td>
<td>6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Farsi</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Russian</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Serbian</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other 23 groups combined</td>
<td>30%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The HAC has taken measures toward cost efficiency by embarking on a block booking session for the Arabic language group. This will significantly reduce the cost whilst also increasing accessibility.

Interviewing clients
Most clients took the opportunity to present their case in person, with nearly three quarters (72%) attending the HAC offices in Burwood for their hearing, slightly lower than the previous year. The remaining quarter (28%) elected to speak to the Committee via conference telephone. In rare cases, where the client opts out of a hearing process altogether, the Committee reviews the case and draws their conclusions from all documented sources of information available. The HAC is exploring the option of speaking with remotely located appellants, as well as those with significant disabilities, via video link given that there are a number of high quality departmental video conference facilities state wide.
The HAC recommended a change of decision in 32% of all cases heard, fewer than in previous years, reflecting the tougher housing environment.

### Table 11: Housing NSW appeal results

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Status</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Declined</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recommended change of decision</td>
<td>66%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Withdrawn or resolved pre hearing</td>
<td>32%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Table 12: Housing NSW final outcomes on recommended cases

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Status</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Agreed with HAC recommendation</td>
<td>90%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alternative option taken</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recommendation not supported</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Housing NSW Appeal outcomes**

The HAC recommended a change of decision in 32% of all cases heard, fewer than in previous years, reflecting the tougher housing environment and greater clarity in the decisions made by housing providers.

90% of the recommendations were implemented by the housing provider and a further 5% of cases were resolved. The remaining 5% were not agreed to and HAC acknowledged the explanation provided by Housing NSW for this.
Table 13: Community housing appeal results

- Declined: 6% (2)  
- Recommended for a change of decision: 41% (13)  
- Resolved: 53% (17)

Table 14: Community housing final outcomes on recommended cases

- Agreed with HAC recommendation: 84% (11)  
- Alternative option taken: 8% (1)  
- Recommendation not supported: 8% (1)
The Committee achieved a fantastic result of an average of 9.5 days to complete the appeal report following the appeal hearing.

What were the reasons behind the HAC recommendations?

Each year, the HAC looks closely at a sample of cases that were recommended for a change in decision to understand the factors that resulted in the Committee questioning the correctness or fairness of the original decision. The following table is based on a sample of 50 cases analysed against set criterion to identify the reasons for the recommendations. Multiple reasons can be given by the Committee for the decision to recommend a change to the original decision. In many cases the opportunity to provide additional information or simply the passage of time, makes a difference to the outcome for the client. The greatest number of recommendations result from the Committee reaching a different decision having considered again the appellant’s documented circumstances within the policy guidelines; this would seem to be an issue of time available to housing staff to make complex decisions and perhaps experience in weighing up often complex medical or social factors. Only 15-20% of the changes of decision are because of incorrect information being used, incorrect interpretation of policy or procedural fairness flaws.

Secretariat Performance

The Secretariat staff undertake all the required client liaison and business processes to ensure a client’s appeal can be listed for a hearing as soon as possible. This largely depends on all the necessary documentation files and evidence being accessible to the Committee either electronically or in a ‘paper version’ of the file. Once a case is ready, the staff will list the case for a hearing within 4 weeks, or 30 calendar days. This year, the staff achieved 27 days from appeal creation to appeal hearing taking place. This is a good result given the increase in appeal numbers and the additional pressures to prioritise certain appeal matters, particularly those that are automatically escalated to the HAC via the recently introduced Housing NSW Accelerated Appeals Process.

Committee Performance

The Committee achieved a fantastic result of an average of 9.5 days to complete the appeal report following the appeal hearing. The performance benchmark in this business activity area is 14 days so this result is outstanding given the complexity of cases and volume of appeals received and completed during the year.

Table 15: Reasons to recommend a change of the original decision

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reason</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Inadequate housing provider consideration of information, evidence or options</td>
<td>65%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Additional information was provided or sought by the HAC</td>
<td>49%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appellant’s circumstances changed or worsened</td>
<td>23%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Incorrect information used by housing provider to reach decision</td>
<td>19%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Policy interpretation incorrect</td>
<td>15%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Procedural fairness flaws</td>
<td>15%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The Secretariat Registrar and Deputy Registrar were out in the community at every opportunity, presenting training, facilitating discussion, liaising with housing providers and advocacy agencies, and increasing awareness of the appeals system. Events were held with Housing NSW, community housing, CALD agencies, Pacific Islander and Aboriginal communities, housing advocates and others with a keen interest in social housing appeals. The Executive Chairperson and Deputy Chairperson also play an important role in information exchange, skill and policy development with agencies in the business of social housing.

Key events in 2012-2013 were:

**HAC Information Forum for Community Agencies:** 205 representatives from community and government agencies attended the year’s major public event, the information forum in Blacktown, hosted by the full Committee and Secretariat team. The half day comprised an information session about appeals and the HAC, an opportunity for questions, and case work exercises in smaller groups. Blacktown Workers Club provided the rooms free of charge to the HAC for this very important event; our thanks to the wonderful staff there. Participants rated the event highly. We are delighted at the range of agencies now better informed about the housing appeals system: police liaison officers, mental health workers, corrective services, electorate officers, major charities, tenant advisory services, Aboriginal support services, CALD specific services, disability support staff, family crisis centre staff including DV, financial counsellors and many others.

Events were held with Housing NSW, community housing, CALD agencies, Pacific Islander and Aboriginal communities, housing advocates and others with a keen interest in social housing appeals.
Testimonial

“The NSW Federation of Housing Associations is the peak industry body for community housing providers in NSW. The Federation works with our members to ensure that they are in the best possible position to deliver quality service to very low to moderate income tenants.

The Centre for Training in Social Housing (CTSH) is the training arm of the Federation and provides nationally recognised training in Certificate IV and Diploma levels in Social Housing to staff and board members of community housing, Aboriginal housing, and public housing across Australia.

CTSH enjoys a strong, collaborative, professional relationship with the Housing Appeals Committee (HAC). This relationship builds the framework of best practice for our members and other training participants, particularly in relation to appeals and good decision making.

The Registrar of HAC, Yasmina Kovacevic and Deputy Registrar Sudesh Kumaran, have regularly provided a guest session in our core training for Certificate IV students. The unit, Manage and Maintain Tenancies and Service Agreements (CHCCH410B), gives an overview of good practice for front line staff in social housing. All Certificate IV students are required to do this unit, and many other social housing staff also chooses to attend the training as a stand-alone course. In collaboration with our trainers, Yasmina and Sudesh developed and deliver the tailored session on appeals and good decision making. They generously share their vast knowledge, skills and experience to the enhancement of knowledge and understanding of appeals processes, good decision making and good practice for the social housing sector. This has been beneficial not just for the students, but also in developing the skills and knowledge of CTSH trainers.

Lynden Esdaile, Executive Chairperson HAC (till 2013) has also been a remarkable resource to the Federation. She has made herself and her staff available to hold excellent sessions at our state-wide conferences, seminars, meetings and other events. She always brought a sound foundation in good decision making to Federation events. For example at a number of seminars on good decision making in relation to the Residential Tenancies Act 2010, she provided a voice of reason in using the law to be consistent with the goals of social housing.

HAC also provides specific appeals training, and advice on developing policy for individual social housing providers.

The input of HAC has been invaluable in the development of good policy, which in turn is reflected in good decision making and good practice, and which then provides the best possible service to social housing clients.

The CTSH will continue to pursue many opportunities to work in partnership with HAC for the continual improvement of our sector.”

HAC Testimonial from the NSW Federation of Housing Associations Inc (Lyndall Katz & Rita McKenzie) –2013

Certificate IV training for NSWFHA – Manage and Maintain Tenancies

Testimonial

“Certificate IV training for NSWFHA – Manage and Maintain Tenancies

Pictured above FHA Training and Policy Team: from left, Poppy Dowsett, Kevin Saide, Rita McKenzie, Lyndall Katz, Joanne Williams.
Good Decision Making Training:
HAC Secretariat staff presented full day sessions of the Good Decision Making in Social Housing course to frontline staff and management of three leading community housing providers in Sydney. The training was well received and useful relationships were established to assist in the developing community housing appeals processes.

Community Housing Tenant Network:
A group of 35 NSW Community Housing Tenant Network representatives from across NSW met in Ashfield. The HAC session concentrated on tenancy matters in relation to appeal issues. HAC presented interesting statistics and data analysis about community housing appeals and received feedback from the tenant representatives on case studies.

HNSW liaison meetings: Regular meetings with Housing NSW at Executive level are vital in addressing crucial areas of policy and procedure in need of review, and providing feedback on issues for frontline decision makers. The HAC has the opportunity to present our learning about policy gaps and unintended consequences, and to take on board feedback from Housing NSW about our work.

Housing Contact Centre, Housing NSW:
More than 200 key frontline Housing Contact Centre (HCC) staff and management participated in a series of tailored training sessions about appeals processes and issues affecting clients unhappy with a decision. This session was developed by Secretariat staff and delivered by the Deputy Registrar, Sudesh Kumaran. Staff gained useful skills and techniques in how to better deal with complex queries taken over the telephone in a busy contact centre environment.

CALD Communities
We were pleased to be invited to host an information session for 25 representatives of CALD agencies in Marrickville. The two hour workshop focused support workers and advocates on how best to assist their clients to put forward an appeal. HAC also presented a session at the Multicultural Seminar in Ashfield about appealable housing issues for CALD communities. The majority of participants were Mandarin speaking elderly residents.

Pacific Islander Communities
The Pacific Islander Communities Forum was held in Campbelltown, with 22 attendees from local services with Pacific Islander clients, many of whom are social housing tenants or applicants. Those present included community elders, advocates and workers. The Deputy Registrar led discussions about the main housing issues faced by Pacific Islander communities and assisted in identifying the best course of action to address these common issues, and when and how to engage with the appeals system.

Aboriginal Communities
The Joint Aboriginal Housing Services (JAHS) is a recurrent joint agency meeting to discuss housing issues for clients and to foster a positive working relationship between agencies. The Deputy Registrar, Sudesh Kumaran assisted JAHS colleagues to organise targeted forums and interagency events for Aboriginal clients on a range of housing related topics. He then attended and presented information sessions to Aboriginal clients and key agency staff about their rights and areas of social housing policy that can be appealed. He delivered sessions at eight key events in metropolitan and Greater Sydney areas.
Health Services

HAC was invited to run a mini forum for Area Health service staff including social workers, mental health workers and OTs, and health advocacy agencies from the Mt Druitt area. The Deputy Registrar assisted discussion about crucial issues in relation to complex needs and specific housing requirements related to a client’s health condition. A second session at Blacktown Hospital was attended by OTs, mental health workers and social workers. This presentation was tailored for health services staff assisting patients who dispute a decision about their eligibility for social housing services.

NSW Ombudsman

The relationship with the NSW Ombudsman’s Office is beneficial to the HAC in maintaining our knowledge of the broader dispute resolution system. This year we presented an overview of the latest policy changes as they affect the social housing appeals jurisdiction to all key staff assisting complainants across NSW.

Housing Information Sessions with Housing NSW and NSW Shelter

Housing NSW in partnership with Shelter NSW recently held two Housing Multicultural Assistance Seminars in June 2013 at Fairfield and Ashfield. The seminars were designed for people working with the multicultural community on how they can help eligible clients to access housing assistance.

Yasmina Kovacevic, Registrar, Housing Appeals Committee delivered a presentation on housing appeals. The other speakers from Housing NSW covered a broad range of topics including: the social housing context, Housing Pathways, the delivery of housing assistance, language services and housing assistance for people with a disability.

There was strong interest in attending the seminars and the feedback and evaluation forms showed positive responses from the 65 or so participants who came from NGOs and Government organisations across the human services sector. One of the participants remarked during a seminar that he found the information useful and appreciated the honest and direct approach used by the presenters in answering the many questions asked during the seminar by the participants. A number of participants noted that they found Yasmina’s presentation on the Housing Appeals Committee to be most informative and useful in their work.

Pictured above: Aboriginal members from left: Anny Druett, Blanch Lake, Neva Collings
The Housing Appeals Committee is an independent agency which deals with appeals from people unhappy with a decision of a social housing provider. We deal with appeals from clients of both

- Housing NSW; and
- Community housing providers in NSW.

Appeals can be about decisions made across a wide range of issues affecting tenants of social housing and applicants for housing services. The HAC aims to improve decision making by housing providers through feedback and training from the appeals experience.

HAC Members and Staff 2012-13

Executive Chairperson: Lynden Esdaile
Deputy Chairperson: Lynn Houlahan
Presiding Chairs: Tacye Bowen, Bronwyn Richards and Stamatia Stamatellis
Members: Ilan Vizel, Blanch Lake, Peter Davidson, Alicia Jillard, Anny Druett, Rebecca Gleeson, Jill Moir, Rachel Da Costa, Nick Illek, Alan Clarke, Julie Hourigan-Ruse, Neva Collings.
Indigenous members: Neva Collings, Anny Druett, Blanch Lake.

Secretariat Staff during 2012-13
Yasmina Kovacevic, Hugh Griffiths, Siniua Su’a, Sudesh Kumaran, Jenny Rowe

Yasmina Kovacevic Registrar
Hugh Griffiths Secretariat Support Officer
Siniua Su’a Senior Registry Officer
Sudesh Kumaran Deputy Registrar
Jenny Rowe Business Support Officer

Prepared by Yasmina Kovacevic, Registrar.
Edited by Tacye Bowen, Presiding Chairperson.