

**Question on Notice**  
**No. 188**  
**Asked on 27 April 2004**

Mr CHOI asked the Minister for Public Works, Housing and Racing (MR SCHWARTEN)-

QUESTION:

Will he advise whether there is any credible long term strategies to reduce public housing shortage by the Federal Government and whether the Federal rent assistance scheme really assists those in part-time work or the unemployed.

ANSWER:

While the Federal Government spends a significant amount of money on housing assistance in Australia each year, through the Commonwealth State Housing Agreement, the First Home Owners Grant and Rent Assistance it has failed to commit to a national housing policy or strategy. This failure of a coordinated approach has resulted in very little change on the ground with more households struggling to meet escalating housing costs.

For example, the Federal Government has spent more than \$3.4 billion in rental assistance payments in Queensland alone yet housing continues to be unaffordable for thousands of Queenslanders and more households are turning to public housing.

Rent Assistance is a significant program for many thousands of people but there is little evidence it provides much relief for low-income households. According to the latest Annual Report of the Department of Family and Community Services, even after households receive their rent assistance payment more than a third still pay more than 30 per cent of their income on rent, while nearly one in ten will be paying more than half their income on rent.

Further, some households in the private rental market are not eligible for the payment at all, such as part time low-income households who do not have children and some households on variable incomes, such as those who are unemployed but may get irregular casual work. It also offers no relief to those households who cannot even get into the private rental market because there is no suitable housing or they face discrimination in the market place. Even though I have called for the Federal Government to review their rental assistance policy they have failed to do so.

Despite this lack of leadership at a national level, State and Territory Housing Ministers have been working together to look at ways to improve the housing system.

However, the reality is no single level of government can tackle the issue of worsening housing affordability — we all have to work together. Without leadership from the Federal Government, it is very difficult for State and Territory government's to deliver significant reforms.

I can advise that this work will be presented to the Federal Minister responsible for Housing, Senator Kay Patterson, who is observing progress.

However, Queensland has continued to deliver innovative responses to address the short supply of affordable housing. The Brisbane Housing Company has been launched and is now fully operational and already managing 130 units. A State Planning Policy on Housing and Residential Development is being developed and just recently substantial Stamp Duty concessions for first home buyers were announced. However, we will remain somewhat limited at what we can achieve at a state level alone while the Federal Government sits on the sidelines.