



City of **HOBART**

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National Housing and Homelessness Plan
Department of Social Services
GPO Box 9820
CANBERRA ACT 2601

Via Email: Housingandhomelessnessplan@dss.gov.au

To Whom it May Concern,

I write to thank you for the opportunity to comment on the Housing and Homelessness Issues Paper that has been developed.

The City of Hobart strongly believes there is an opportunity for collective action on the issues of housing and homelessness and provides the attached submission.

Please do not hesitate to contact my office should you have any questions or queries.

We look forward to working with you in the future.

Yours sincerely,

(Kat Panjari)
ACTING CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER

City *of* **HOBART**

Submission to the National Housing and Homelessness Action Plan

About the City of HOBART

The City of Hobart is the local government body covering the central metropolitan area of Lutruwita/Tasmania's capital city Nipaluna/Hobart.

The present-day council entity was legislated in 1852 with the role of Lord Mayor created in 1934.

As enshrined in legislation, the key function of local government is:

- To provide for the health, safety and welfare of the community;
- To represent the interests of the community; and
- To provide for the municipal area's peace, order and good government.

The City of Hobart delivers a range of services to over 56,000 residents and employs over 550 staff.

Submission

1. How can governments and community service providers reduce homelessness and/or support people who may be at risk of becoming homeless in Australia?

The City of Hobart welcomes the opportunity to provide a submission to the public consultation of the National Housing and Homelessness Action Plan (the Plan). We believe there is an opportunity for collective action on this issue and are hopeful the Plan will encourage all key stakeholders to address Australia's housing challenges.

Every Australian deserves the safety and security of a home, and it is vital that all levels of government cooperate to deliver safe, inclusive, and accessible social and affordable housing. It is also important that adequate supports are put in place for those who are experiencing, or at risk of experiencing, homelessness.

The National Plan should drive an initial set of concrete policy changes to reduce homelessness and establish a process to improve and strengthen actions to end homelessness over time in order to progress towards the target of eliminating homelessness.

Data from the 2021 census reports that the total number of people experiencing homelessness in Tasmania was 2350 which is an increase of 45% since 2016. Young

people were overrepresented as most of those reporting homelessness in Tasmania were under 35 years old, including 25% aged between 12-24 years and 14% being children under 12 years of age. In light of these statistics and based on sentiments represented by the homelessness sector supporting these children and young people, the City would support the development of a standalone National Housing and Homelessness Plan for children and young people. If this is not possible, at a minimum a detailed action plan prioritising this cohort should be part of the plan.

We note that the 2021 census occurred during the pandemic with additional emergency accommodation provided by states and territories. This may mean some were temporarily housed on census night but would otherwise be homeless.

The current situation of people exiting prison into homelessness needs to be addressed at a systemic level. Feedback from community organisations working in the homelessness sector in Tasmania advise that this continues to be a significant issue and has a direct impact on the availability of crisis accommodation and the number of people sleeping rough.

The City of Hobart recognises that all levels of government have a responsibility to communicate human-centred narratives around housing and homelessness. The *'I Am Somebody'* project highlights the reality for people experiencing homelessness and housing stress in Tasmania. The 2022 iteration expanded with support and involvement of the Clarence City Council, Glenorchy City Council and Huon Valley Council. With support from the State and Federal Government, an expansion of this type of awareness raising initiative can help reduce "nimbyism" and support safe and inclusive communities across Australia.

2. How can governments, across all levels, best work with communities to support better housing outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples?

The City of Hobart highlights that it is difficult to end homelessness without changes that address the major social drivers of homelessness across the population, including racism and discrimination, economic deprivation, the adequacy and security of income support, access to affordable housing and family wellbeing.

It is also important that the affected communities have a seat at the table in identifying the underlying causes and the interventions that can lead to better outcomes. To this end, the Hobart City Council has resolved to support Constitutional Recognition of an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Voice to Parliament.

3. How can all levels of government, along with housing organisations, institutional investors, not-for-profits, and private industry, improve access to social housing, which includes public housing and community housing?

As the demand of housing rapidly increases, the City of Hobart sees great potential in working in partnership with community and across all levels of government to shape our key residential and commercial areas. A current example is the draft Central Hobart Neighbourhood Structure Plan. A partnership between the City of Hobart, Tasmanian Government and the community, the draft plan will enable increased residential density, as well as identifying the infrastructure, open space, transport, and commercial opportunities required to meet the needs of a growing population.

This approach includes significant community engagement to bring the community along and help overcome negative sentiment towards increased density. The City is developing these neighbourhood plans across the LGA to ensure that we are fostering inclusive communities for our growing population.

To manage increased growth and encourage the establishment of liveable, connected, and accessible communities, it is critical that the Federal Government work closely with local and state governments, industry, and community to identify and prioritise funding investments in infrastructure, public transport, and services such as health, childcare and education. Of particular importance in the Greater Hobart context is the Northern Suburbs Transit Corridor that will connect employment and activity centres to the central business district to meet the changing needs of our growing population.

The City welcomes the recent outcomes from the 16 August 2023 meeting of National Cabinet and highlight that it is critical that growing communities like Greater Hobart receive its fair share of funding under the Housing Support Program. We also note that it is critical that local government be included as a project partner in the delivery of housing in our communities.

4. What should governments, private industries, the not-for-profit and community sectors focus on to help improve access to housing and housing affordability in the private market?

Local government can also play a key role in facilitating partnerships between governments, industry, community, and the housing sector to deliver innovative housing solutions. The City of Hobart is excited by the opportunity to work closely with the Australian Government, the Tasmanian Government and community housing providers in this regard.

The City of Hobart emphasises that the lack of affordable housing disproportionately impacts the most vulnerable in our community. May 2023 data provided by Homes Tasmania has calculated the 12-month average waiting period for priority applicants on the housing register was 78.5 weeks. It is vital that both the Tasmanian and Australian Governments follow through and deliver on social housing commitments.

Local communities will feel the negative impacts of persistent housing unaffordability in the private market. Expensive rental and ownership markets make it harder to attract and retain key workers including nurses and midwives which is likely to impact the delivery of health services. A recent study undertaken by the University of Sydney found that workers across 21 key sectors including teachers, nurses, bus drivers and ICT workers could not afford to buy in any local government area in Metropolitan Sydney or Melbourne. It's critical that Hobart and Tasmania manage this issue into the future.

5. How could governments work better with industry, community services and other organisations to improve housing outcomes for all Australians?

The City of Hobart recognises that there is also a need to work with communities to ensure that people realise the benefits of social housing in their neighbourhoods. While local government is well placed to support these community conversations, the City of Hobart believes that there is a role for a national public campaign around the benefits of neighbourhoods with diverse housing stock. This includes advocating for increased provision of housing stock utilising universal design principles to ensure availability for people with increased access requirements.

In a Tasmanian context, community housing providers play a pivotal role in the provision and management of social housing. Recognition of the value of these organisations and facilitating opportunities for collaboration with all levels of government to maximise potential investment options is of high importance.

The New South Wales Productivity Commission recently published a report which outlined the significant cost of urban sprawl in Sydney. The crux of the report is that increasing greenfield development will cost the state's economy significantly more when compared with the cost of inner-city housing. This cost was calculated by examining the delivery of essential services including wastewater, public transport, road infrastructure, schools, and open spaces. We highlight that optimised strategic planning can raise productivity, living standards, and quality of life by encouraging residential and commercial development growth in areas with existing infrastructure.

6. How can governments and the private and community sectors, help to improve sustainable housing and better prepare housing for the effects of climate change?

The City highlights that is an opportunity to support those experiencing homelessness in response to extreme weather events. The need for an extreme weather emergency response protocol for Tasmania was initially raised at a City of Hobart facilitated Homelessness Summit in 2019. This goal was identified for priority action through the Greater Hobart Homelessness Alliance (which includes representation from the Tasmanian Government).

Given the increasingly acute housing crisis, as well as the impact of climate change in increasingly extreme weather events, the City of Hobart advocates that there is an opportunity to seek the development of a national extreme weather emergency response protocol. Such a protocol would identify the roles, responsibilities, and resource contribution of each party as well as the necessary triggers for action, mechanisms for implementation and communication channels that enable a community to quickly stand-up local emergency evacuation venues and engage appropriate support for rough sleepers who may be impacted by extreme weather events. All levels of government can influence the provision of secure and affordable housing designed to mitigate the risks of climate change while also protecting residents from health impacts from more frequent extreme weather. In a paper published by the University of Sydney, researchers noted there is an opportunity to develop strategies to improve the thermal efficiency of housing occupied by people most vulnerable to heat impacts. Initiatives could include improving the quality, thermal efficiency, and cooling of low-cost housing, targets to improve urban canopy cover, providing access to public cool spaces to name a few. The City of Hobart's green infrastructure plan has a target of planting enough trees across Hobart to create an urban tree canopy of 40 per cent by 2046.

The City welcomes the Federal Budget 2023-24 announcement of the \$1.3 billion Household Energy Upgrades Fund for critical energy upgrades to social housing. The City highlights that improving existing rental stock is a major challenge to reducing household emissions and improving the liveability of existing housing stock in a changing climate. We note that tenants are disproportionately affected by this as tenants are often reliant on fossil fuel powered gas or electric heaters and electric air conditioners for immediate heating and cooling in an existing house which may not be as well insulated as a modern dwelling. Australian Housing and Urban Research Institute (AHURI) has identified that the introduction of minimum rental housing standards is the most effective way to support low-income household tenants. The City looks forward to hearing more about the implementation of the proposed minimum standards recently announced after the recent National Cabinet meeting.

7. Is there anything else you would like to tell us?

Throughout the course of the COVID-19 pandemic, housing became one of the first defences against contracting a novel disease. Communities around the globe transitioned their entire lives into their homes by working, teaching, parenting, exercising, and socialising all out of a singular place.

The pandemic has highlighted the divide between those that have safe, secure, and appropriate housing and those that are living in precarious situations. Those experiencing family violence, economic distress and people living in dilapidated and unsafe housing are particularly vulnerable as options to relocate may be limited.

We also highlight the intersectionality of issues connected to a lack of secure housing. As highlighted by the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW) some health problems are a consequence of homelessness, including depression, poor nutrition, poor dental health, substance abuse and mental health problems. It is critical that all levels of government address and mitigate the social, economic and physical impacts for those experiencing and those at risk of homelessness or inadequate housing.

The City of Hobart welcomes the recent outcomes of the August meeting of the National Cabinet to implement minimum quality standards for rental properties in Australia. The City of Hobart notes that this type of implementation must include an appropriate independent body to oversee and enforce these standards rather than this burden being placed on vulnerable tenants.

The City looks forward to hearing more information about how states and territories may consider better regulation of short-stay accommodation. Recent research from the University of New South Wales found that 47 per cent of short stay rentals in Greater Hobart were previously in the long-term rental market. This data suggests that the growth of the short-term rental market has directly impacted the long-term rental market and local government needs additional scope to regulate the sector.