State Election
PLATFORM
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Homelessness NSW

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Introduction

The upcoming NSW State Election provides an important opportunity to commit to addressing and preventing homelessness.

Having access to affordable, sustainable housing brings a positive contribution to people's lives and the New South Wales Government must play an essential role in ensuring it is available to NSW citizens.

However, rates of homelessness in NSW continue to rise. There were **37,715** people in NSW in the Census who are classified as being homeless on Census night 2016 (up 37% from 27,479 in 2011). This is higher than the national increase of 14%. Over the past 4 years, there has been a 43% increase in the number of clients Specialist Homelessness Services (SHSs) have supported - in 2016/17 over 74,000 clients were supported by SHSs in New South Wales – yet they are only contracted to deliver services to 57,000 clients each year.

Addressing and preventing homelessness in New South Wales requires:

1. **An Affordable Housing Strategy** that includes the delivery of 5,000 new social housing dwellings a year until 2026, provides commitments to effective inclusionary zoning and affordable housing targets for new developments and ensures no-exits from social housing.

2. A **10-year plan to end homelessness** that includes no exits into homelessness, systemic funding of supportive housing approaches, a focus on ending inner city homelessness and a focus on prevention.

3. **Enhancements to the Specialist Homelessness System** that addresses gaps created by Going Home Staying Home

We call upon all parties and candidates to adopt these priorities in the lead up to the NSW election, and to work alongside us in delivering them.

Katherine McKernan,
CEO, Homelessness NSW

About Us

Homelessness NSW is a peak not for profit organisation that works with its members to prevent and reduce homelessness across NSW. Our members include small, locally based community organisations, multiservice agencies with a regional reach and large State-wide service providers.

Key services that we provide include policy development and advocacy in working to end homelessness, public education about the changing faces of homeless people and those at risk, information about the diverse mix of initiatives operating in NSW and elsewhere and advice and support for member organisations and others about organisational change and improvement.

Homelessness
Quick Facts

According to the 2016 Census there were:

37,715 people experiencing homelessness in NSW

(an increase of 37% from 2011)

116,427 people experiencing homelessness in Australia

(an increase of 14% from 2011)

Specialist homelessness services

- In 2017/18 approximately:71,000 clients were supported by homelessness services (38% increase since 2013/14)

- 27,000 clients were escaping domestic and family violence (37% of all clients)

- 13,400 clients were unaccompanied young people aged 15 – 24 (19% of all clients)

- 20,000 clients were Aboriginal (28% of all clients)

- 2 in 5 clients did not receive crisis or other accommodation despite requesting it

Housing stats

- Less than **1%** of *private rentals are affordable in the greater Sydney area for people on low incomes*

- There are **60,000** people on the social housing waiting list and the waiting list can be between 2 and 10 years.

Addressing Homelessness

With our current resources, New South Wales should be the leading state in addressing and preventing homelessness. However, rates of homelessness in NSW continue to rise. There were 37,715 people in NSW in the Census who are classified as being homeless on Census night 2016 (up 37% from 27,479 in 2011). This is higher than the national increase of 14%.

To address these rates, Homelessness NSW believes the following policies and programs should be committed to.

Priority One: An Affordable Housing Strategy

Having access to affordable, sustainable housing brings a positive contribution to people's lives and the New South Wales Government must play an essential role in ensuring it is available to NSW citizens. This can be achieved through implementing a resourced Affordable Housing Strategy which incorporates and commits to the following:

A. 5,000 new social housing dwellings a year until 2026

The current NSW Social and Affordable Housing Fund initiative is expected to generate 3,400 social and affordable homes over several years. However, research conducted by Professor Hal Pawson (UNSW) estimates that this figure is less than half the increase required to even retain the current levels of unmet housing need .

Research commissioned by the Community Housing Industry NSW (CHIA NSW) Social and affordable housing projections 2016-2026 indicates that NSW requires 5,000 social housing dwellings a year until 2026 for low income households. This projection of social housing need is based on what would be required to return the social housing stock to a 6% share (of occupied stock) by 2026. It includes combining the annual net additions needed to sustain a 6% share from 2016 with the increase needed to make up the current shortfall to 6% (assuming this is done in equal increments over the 10-year period).

A copy of Social and affordable housing projections 2016-2026 is available at CHIA NSW's website

B. A commitment to effective zoning and affordable housing targets (of between 30-40%) for privately owned development sites.

CHIA's research calculates that a further 7,500 additional affordable rental dwellings are needed each year to cover those identified as currently being in rental stress. It is essential that the private sector contribute to developing affordable housing options for those most vulnerable. Inclusionary zoning means compelling developers to include affordable/social housing in the development of their new apartments. Mandated inclusionary zoning is long-established in planning practice in many of Sydney's comparator cities internationally.

Implementing mandated inclusionary zoning targets of between 30-40% for privately owned development sites in NSW will go a long way to ensuring people in NSW have access to a place to call home.

C. A commitment to no exits into homelessness from social housing.

A large number of people become homeless after exiting the social housing system.

The 2016 Homelessness NSW report *Debt Set Unfair* identified the following as factors causing exits from social housing into homelessness :

A recent study in the *Medical Journal of Australia* found that 21% of the 2,388 people who visited clinics in inner-Sydney homeless hostels between 2008 and 2016 had become homeless after losing their public housing tenancy.

· inadequate information and support provided on the rights of survivors of domestic and family violence in relation to tenancy charges, notice and ability to appeal decisions of FACS Housing;

· inadequate strategies within FACS Housing to identify and assist clients regularly fall into rental arrears; and

· the current lack of non-financial methods to re-pay outstanding debt with FACS Housing (for example through the Work and Development Order System which applies to the fines system in NSW).

Debt Set Unfair contained a number of recommendations to prevent exits from social housing into homelessness including:

· providing better support to survivors of domestic/family violence by FACS Housing amending its domestic and family violence to contain information on the rights of survivors of domesticand family violence in relation to tenancy charges

· requiring Community Housing Providers abide by the FACS Housing domestic and family violence strategy;

· providing greater training for FACS Housing staff on how best to support and respond to survivors of domestic/family violence with arrears.

· developing publicly available clear, written guidelines to assist potential applicants and their advocates in seeking write off or waiver of debts.

· expand the operation of the Work and Development Scheme to tenants with unresolved debts.

Robert's story

Robert, aged 53 was a social housing tenant, having been in his property for 5 years after an extended period of homelessness. Robert's childhood experiences and his time rough sleeping have led to him having issues with alcohol dependence.

He has previously applied for the Disability Support Pension but his application was been rejected and he was placed on a Newstart payment requiring him to apply for number of jobs per fortnight. After missing a number of appointments with Centrelink 'without a valid reason', Robert was breached by Centrelink.

As his social housing rent was automatically deducted using the Rent Deduction Scheme, he defaulted on his payments to FACS NSW and fell into a cycle of debt which ultimately resulted in being evicted from his tenancy into homelessness.

Robert is currently receiving support from a specialist homelessness service but is not eligible to re-join the Housing Waiting list due to his negative classification as a former tenant.

Priority Two: A 10 year plan to address homelessness

Ending homelessness requires whole of government commitment to a targeted, funded, long-term plan. While the NSW Government recently introduced the NSW Homelessness Strategy this strategy does not commit additional resources that are essentially to reduce and ultimately ending homelessness.

Such a plan would include the following:

A. A whole of government commitment to no exits into homelessness

To end homelessness, you must prevent people from becoming homeless in the first place. However, people exiting prison, leaving hospital or out of home care have a high risk of homelessness or returning to an institution soon after leaving.

For example, in 2016/17 over 600 women accessed SHSs by exiting directly from custodial arrangements.

Fixing this, requires a whole of government ownership of preventing homelessness within the Health, Education and Justice portfolios in particular. This would include all relevant NSW government agencies being required to develop, prioritise and report against an outcomes framework of no-exits into homelessness. This approach should also be supported by a cross-government taskforce which is responsible for monitoring and ensuring the compliance of governance agencies and departments.

A recent study in the *Medical Journal of Australia* found that 28% of the 2,388 people who visited clinics in inner-Sydney homeless hostels between 2008 and 2016 had become homeless after re-lease from prison. A further 21 % became homeless after discharge from a psychiatric hospital.

B. Include a systemic, funded and evidence-based supportive housing response

International evidence shows that key to ending homelessness is a rapid rehousing approach. This requires shifting from the crisis/transitional approach and moving towards Housing First.

To effectively implement a Housing First approach, it NSW is essential that

- There is an adequate supply of social housing to facilitate rapid rehousing (see above);
- Support services are funded to be able to assist individuals and families to establish and maintain their tenancies.
- Supportive housing is the foundation to social housing allocation policy; and
- Supportive housing that is appropriate for different cohorts including rough sleepers, people leaving custody, people with complex needs, families and young people.

Michelle's story

Michelle is an Aboriginal women who was residing in social housing.

Michelle was forced to exit her tenancy after experiencing domestic violence and became homeless. Michelle entered the crisis accommodation system before eventually gaining a tenancy in transitional housing.

Her period in transitional housing was quite difficult for her as she recieved fragmented and she had not had consistent assistance to work on her future housing goals.

When her 2 years in transitional housing were coming to an end the tenancy provider did not provide her an option other than ending her lease. As a result, Michelle was once again homeless.

Michelle is currently working on accessing crisis accommodation, and working with crisis supports. However she is finding it difficult to access crisis accommodation as there is an expectation that housing issues are resolved during time in transitional programs.

She currently has limited options and cannot forsee having long-term, secure housing.
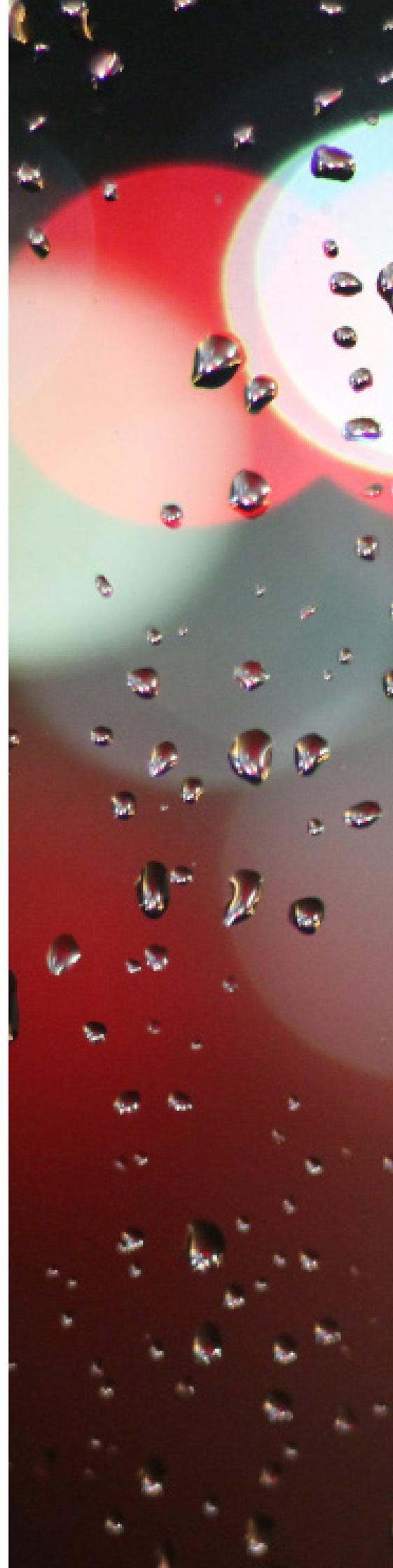
Fiona's story

Fiona had a complex history of childhood abuse and had also experienced severe domestic violence. Her experiences led her to drug use, her incarceration, and the loss of permanent care of her 3 children 2 years ago.

Fiona was extremely motivated to stay clean and regain custody of her children upon release. She exited prison in the Sydney area to a regional centre 2 ½ hours drive away (without transport).

The area Fiona was returning to has an 8-10 year waiting list for social housing. Fiona was unable to be even placed on the waiting list as she had prior debt with FACS Housing. Once agreeing to re-payments, she was told she still not be eligible to be placed on the waiting list for 6 months. In the meantime, Fiona was placed in temporary accommodation but was required to frequently move accommodation providers.

During this time Fiona had meetings with Family and Community Services and visits with her children with a view to a restoration plan. However, this was dependant on her having accessed accommodation suitable for the children to go to. Unable to access social housing,

Fiona began to look for private accommodation, with a limit of $200 as per her Newstart payments. With only one property on the rental market at that price, she was in competition with 30 others at each viewing and with no references for her rental history.

Despite being at risk of homelessness, Fiona began to look for employment. To work in areas where there are employment opportunities related to her qualification was impossible due to Fiona's history of incarceration.

When Fiona used all the 28 days temporary accommodation she was eligible for, she tried to move in with the local women's refuge which was full.

With no ability to obtain employment, access social housing or private rental or even support from local services, Fiona became homeless and began a relationship with a known violent offender and drug user. A short time later, despite her best efforts best efforts on release she now finds herself back in prison and pregnant.

C. Focusing on Aboriginal Homelessness

Homelessness services in the inner city and elsewhere are experiencing high demand from Aboriginal people experiencing homelessness, including families.

There has been an increasing 'mainstreaming' of Aboriginal service provision to Aboriginal people and communities in the SHS packages which does not align to good practice regarding cultural safety and self-determination (for both clients and workers)

To address this, funding to prevent and address Aboriginal people experiencing homelessness must be redirected to Aboriginal community controlled initiatives and services and resources provided to build the capability and capacity of these services to provide support to clients.

2,278 Aboriginal people were recorded as homeless in NSW in 2016 (up 3% from 2,205 in 2011).

Aboriginal people make up 2.9% of the total NSW population but accounted for 6% of the entire homeless population in NSW.

Currently, 28% of all SHS clients are Aboriginal, this is an increase of 60% since the Going Home Staying Home reforms

Kate's story

Kate is a 16 year old Aboriginal young women who is currently in a Juvenile Justice Centre.

Kate has extensive mental health issues, including suffering from post-traumatic stress disorder after a traumatic incident. She also has recently reported hearing voices.

She has no formal education beyond primary school and has a fractured relationship with her family and her cultural background. Kate also has engaged in high risk behaviours to make money for her drug use.

Prior to being in detention , Kate has had numerous stays in refuges. These services have attempted to connect her to mental health services, but have had limited success due to their long wait lists.

Kate is about to be released from the Juvenile Justice Centre into homelessness. Numerous unsuccessful attempts have been made to engage her with mental health services and the specialist aboriginal mental health service.
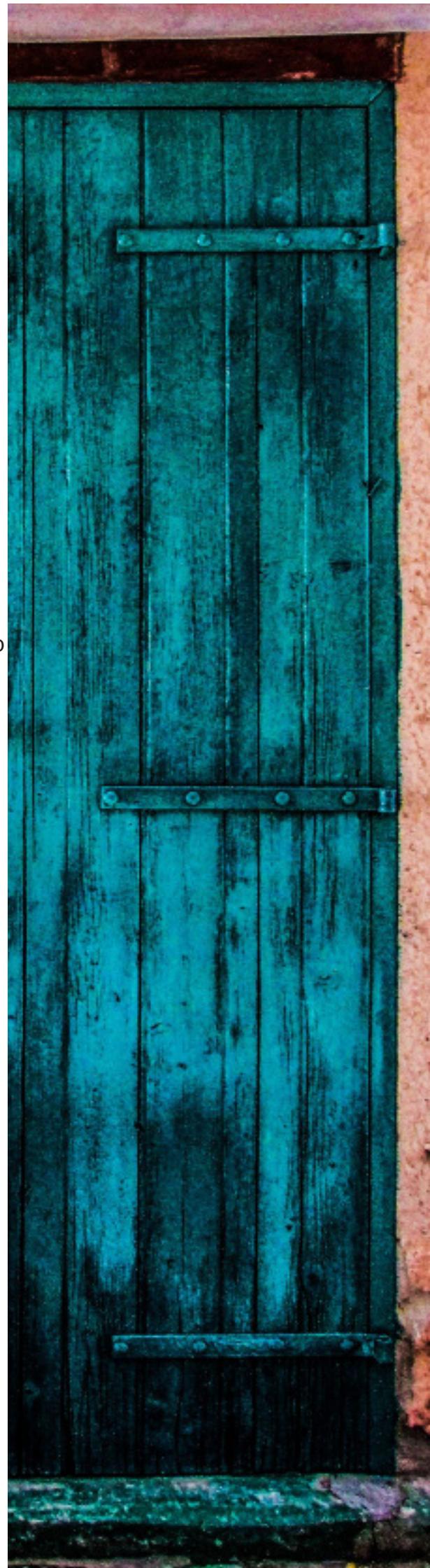
Priority Three: Reforms to the SHS system

Since the Going Home Staying Home reforms there are a number of significant issues within the SHS sector. These includes significant gaps in service provision, no outcomes measurement, complicated contractual arrangements that impact on service delivery, particularly to Aboriginal communities and clients requiring specialist support and systems that were implemented that are inadequately resourced to meet service system needs (access system, quality system).

To address these the following measures are needed:

- an evaluation of SHS service gaps and development of a plan to address these gaps, including new investment in intensive support and supportive housing models;
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- development of a Homelessness Outcomes Framework that monitors agreed tar-gets to reduce and end homelessness;

- a review of prevention and early intervention practice and implementation of adequately resourced strategies that effectively define, measure and invest in these ap-proaches;

- review of the access system (Link2Home, DVLine), including referrals to other service systems and consent usage;

- reviewing Joint Working Agreements and commitment to change these where they are not equitable or functioning effectively in advance of the 2020 recontracting process;

- development of the Homelessness Quality Assurance System into an independent verification process to ensure the delivery of high quality services.

- review effective practice such as Tenancy Support and Brokerage, and implement strategies that can support and improve implementation across NSW.

Wendy's story

Wendy is 16 years old, 6 months into her pregnancy and experiencing homelessness.

She recently was turned away from the local youth refuge as they do not accommodate young mums in their refuge (she was eligible to stay but only until baby was born). The service could provide her with short term financial assistance, but this required her attend the office (some distance away) to get the support.

With no other service available to work with her, a women's shelter agreed to change its delivery pattern and staffing arrangements to enable her to stay with them.

Henry's story

Henry is aged 15. He does not have contact with his parents and previously lived with his aunt from the age of 2.

After a family breakdown, Henry's aunt put in place an AVO to prevent him from returning to her home. He became homeless and was placed in a refuge.

Henry was progressing well while residing in the refuge and engaging with program to assist with his drug use. After a month of residing in the refuge, he was removed by FACS as the refuge was not an approved organisation to house young people under the care of the Minister. He has been placed in a motel with FACS workers where he has been residing for the past 2 months.

NSW STATE ELECTION

Homelessness NSW

Key Priorities

TO PREVENT AND REDUCE HOMELESSNESS:

An affordable Housing Strategy

that includes the delivery of 5,000 new social housing dwellings a year until 2026, provides commitments to effective zoning and affordable housing targets for new developments and ensures no-exits from social housing.

A 10 year plan to end homelessness

that includes

- No exits into homelessness;
- A systemic, funded supportive housing response;
- Housing First and Assertive Outreach responses
- Aboriginal community controlled organisations
- Integration with the NSW Domestic and Family Violence service system
- commitment to end youth homelessness

Enhancements to the SHS system

that address gaps created by Going Home Staying Home reform process including no outcomes measurement, complicated contractual arrangements that impact on service delivery, particularly to Aboriginal communities and clients requiring specialist support