

## **NSW Housing Strategy**

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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.

Every person has the right to an adequate standard of living, which includes the right to adequate housing. The right to housing is more than simply a right to shelter. It is a right to have somewhere to live that is safe, affordable and provides the amenities required to live a healthy life.

We are pleased to acknowledge that the discussion paper recognises some of the failings of the current housing supply system. Falling home ownership rates, increasing level of homelessness and housing stress are all indicators of a housing market failing its most basic goal – to ensure all people are housed.

In NSW every person should be adequately housed. Any housing strategy must have this as one of its key aims.

Unfortunately in NSW too many people have no place to call home. NSW experienced the highest rate of homelessness across states and territories from 2011-2016, with the number increasing by 37% in this period, significantly higher than the national increase of 14%. What we need to remember is that this was during a time of a booming economy, with Greater Sydney and many regional areas undertaking unprecedented development. New dwelling investment accounted for 5.3% of SFD in 2015-16. Growth in new dwelling investment increased at a rate of 13.0% in 2015-16. This followed a 12.2% lift in 2014-15 and was the highest annual rate of growth in dwelling investment in NSW in 13 years.

While homelessness got worse during boom times, we believe it will continue to worsen during bust times as well. Modelling undertaken by [Equity Economics](#) has identified that due to the economic impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic, homelessness in NSW is likely to increase by up to 16,000 people.

This is why Homelessness NSW sees the development of a 20-year housing strategy as both timely and necessary.

## Recommendations

**Recommendation 1** - An additional 5,000 new social housing dwellings every year for the next 10 years just to meet current demand.

NSW is facing a crisis. There are currently over 50,000 applicants on the Housing Register. Close to 4,500 of these are deemed priority. According to the latest data available of the 25 housing zones across Sydney it is only in the Mt Druitt zone that there is less than a 5 year wait for any housing type. It is a similar story on the Central Coast with a minimum of a 5 year wait for any housing type. It is clearly unacceptable to expect people in need of housing to wait for 10 years or more. Investing in social housing needs to be seen as an investment in NSW and its people. Programs such as Communities Plus and the SAHF while bringing some additional social housing have in no way met the level of demand.

Investment in social housing at this juncture will also assist the economy. According to [Equity Economics](#) there are approximately 85,000 construction jobs and 97,000 small to medium enterprises at risk as a result of the economic consequences of the pandemic – significant investment in social housing would not only help end homelessness but it would also maintain employment across NSW.

**Recommendation 2** - Investment in supportive housing models such as Housing First and Foyer models to support people sleeping rough and young people and ensuring that crisis accommodation is fit for purpose.

Homelessness NSW welcomes the Premier's Priority to end street sleeping as a first step to ending homelessness in NSW and investment in Housing First for people experiencing rough sleeping is vital if we are going to meet the Premier's Priority. The Housing First model prescribes safe and permanent housing as the first priority for people experiencing homelessness. Once housing is secured, a multidisciplinary team of support workers can address complex needs through services like drug and alcohol counselling or mental health treatment. While there is some variety in the way the model has been adopted by different countries, the guiding principle of Housing First is that safe and secure housing should be quickly provided prior to, and not conditional upon, addressing other health and well-being issues. With its recent announcement of Together Home the NSW Government has acknowledged that Housing First is the acknowledged way to end street homelessness.

Homelessness NSW has long advocated for Housing First to be incorporated as a component of social housing, for those that require support to maintain tenancies. Together Home is a great first step towards this and should be looked at being funded permanently and expanded where necessary.

However, rough sleeping is under 8% of the total homeless population in NSW. Youth homelessness is a significant issue in NSW and the 2016 census data indicates that 1% of all young people aged 18 – 24 in NSW are experiencing homelessness. In addition to this the economic impacts of the pandemic will disproportionately impact young people. Any NSW Housing Strategy needs to include consideration and investment in housing models that meet the needs of young people.

To address the rising numbers of youth homelessness NSW needs to invest in housing that has an evidence base. Shared housing and Youth Foyer models are internationally recognised as demonstrating

real outcomes in helping end youth homelessness. Any investment in social and affordable housing should incorporate these models into its approach.

Youth Foyers provide integrated learning and accommodation for young people who are homeless or at risk of experiencing homelessness. Victoria, South Australia and Western Australia have developed and invested in this model and are providing it at a scale that should be replicated in NSW. Youth Foyers offer young people the time, personalised attention, mentoring, coaching and access to opportunities needed to develop education and training pathways that lead to sustainable employment. To operate youth foyer models we need investment in both the housing and support elements.

Finally, it would be great to see NSW move towards a fit for purpose model of crisis accommodation. That is, reconfiguring and rebuilding crisis accommodation services so that they are more able to provide independent living with support on site. The Core and Cluster approach that is currently being rolled out to improve services to women and children escaping domestic and family violence (with the first project launched in Griffith in May 2020) is a key example. It would be good to expand this model across NSW as part of considering homelessness within the NSW Housing Strategy.

**Recommendation 3** - Mandated inclusionary zoning in all local government areas to increase the supply of affordable housing. NSW is facing a crisis of affordable housing as well as social housing. Homelessness NSW believes that mandated inclusionary zoning is the optimal way to meet this need. On Government owned land Homelessness NSW would support inclusionary zoning at a level of 50% in areas close to transport, education and employment opportunities. On privately owned land it should be at least 30% when the same criteria of transport, education and employment are met. When land further away from such opportunities is being developed lesser rates can be applied.

**Recommendation 4** – Reform Boarding Houses. Close to 7,000 people in NSW reside in boarding houses. For the foreseeable future they will be an essential component of the affordable housing answer for Greater Sydney. Among the issues regarding Boarding Houses is the fact that despite they receive benefits under the planning laws there is no guaranteed community benefit in the provision of affordable housing. Boarding houses are granted an FSR bonus which allows for greater density. Homelessness NSW believes that if a developer is to receive an FSR bonus then a mandated level of affordable housing must be included.

**Recommendation 5** –Universal design. As the NSW Government Ageing Strategy correctly points out – NSW has an ageing population and it is critical to have a plan for current needs as well as new and emerging issues expected to affect seniors in the near future. We believe that the homes we build for today should be fit for all of tomorrow’s Australians. As such all housing built in NSW should be of Gold Standard Universal Design.

Yours sincerely



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CEO