

HOUSING JUSTICE: INVEST IN SOCIAL HOUSING

Recommendation: The next NSW Government should work towards an additional 5,000 social housing homes per annum for the next ten years.

THE ISSUE

In NSW, more than 50,000 households – over 125,000 people - are on the social housing waitlist.¹ Although these families have been approved as meeting the eligibility criteria for social housing, most face waits of at least 5-10 years before they will be offered a home.

As people wait for a safe and affordable home, the experience of housing insecurity and stress – and the constant risk of homeless – takes a physical, emotional and mental toll. Without a stable home it is hard to make social connections, mend or nurture relationships, gain a qualification, or find and keep a job.

The lack of social housing is contributing to high and growing rates of homelessness and is limiting people's choices. Each year, an estimated 2,400 women become homeless because they could not find secure and permanent housing after leaving violence. Another 2,400 returned to live with a violent partner due to lack of an affordable alternative.² The lack of social housing also weakens community resilience in the face of climate disasters such as the Northern Rivers floods.³

In NSW, social housing now comprises only 4.7% of total social housing stock - down from 5.1% in 2001.⁴ The long-term decline in stock is due to lack of adequate investment from successive State and Federal Governments. Despite some welcome commitments in recent years – most notably the NSW Government's Social and Affordable Housing Fund – investment in new social housing supply remains well short of meeting current and anticipated need.

THE SOLUTION

There is widespread consensus that large scale and sustained investment in social housing is needed to address high and growing levels of need in the community, arrest the increase in homelessness, and create a more resilient housing system.

In the most recent term of Government, the Regional Housing Taskforce, the Independent Flood Inquiry, and Infrastructure NSW all recommended significant and sustained investment in social housing. Several parliamentary inquiries also recognised the need for more social housing.⁵

Over 10 years, five thousand additional social housing homes per annum would:

- cut the social housing waiting list by 75%,
- reduce the number of people experiencing homelessness by more than 16,000,
- provide housing for more than 33,000 households experiencing housing stress.⁶

¹ NSW DCJ (2022) Expected Waiting Times. Available at <https://www.facs.nsw.gov.au/housing/help/applying-assistance/expected-waiting-times>

² Equity Economics (2021) Rebuilding Women's Economic Security – Investing in Social Housing in New South Wales, Sydney

³ van den Nouwelant, R. & Cibir, A. (2022) "The impact of housing vulnerability on climate disaster recovery: The 2022 Northern Rivers Floods" (Sydney: City Futures Research Centre)

⁴ Groenhart, L. and Burke, T. (2014) *Thirty years of public housing supply and consumption: 1981–2011*, AHURI Final Report No.231. Melbourne, Australian Housing and Urban Research Institute: https://www.ahuri.edu.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0008/2042/AHURI_Final_Report_No231_Thirty-years-of-public-housing-supply-and-consumption-1981-2011.pdf.

⁵ For example, the inquiries into *Homelessness amongst older people aged over 55 in New South Wales*, and *Options to improve access to existing and alternate accommodation to address the social housing shortage*.

⁶ Writer, T., Barnes, E., Hartley, C., Wearing, A. *Social Housing in New South Wales: Report 2 Future Impact*, (2022), Sydney: Centre for Social Impact

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A safe, secure and affordable place to call home gives people who have experienced disadvantage or trauma a foundation from which they can look to a positive future. It can break intergenerational cycles of poverty, and help avoid the high social and economic costs of homelessness – estimated to be between \$25,000 and \$30,000 p.a.⁷

In addition to social benefits, increased investment in social housing would support 16,200 construction jobs,⁸ give the construction and housing industries the certainty needed to deliver at scale, and have a significant multiplier effect on the broader economy.⁹

The Federal Government's new Housing Australia Future Fund seeks to build 30,000 social and affordable housing properties in its first five years.¹⁰ The NSW Government should leverage this investment to work towards delivering 5,000 new social housing homes per year with the view to increasing social housing to a 10% of housing stock in NSW.

FACTS

- Only 4.7% of homes in NSW are social housing homes – down from 5.1% in 2001.¹¹
- Of the 6,000 additional social housing homes promised through the Communities Plus Program, only 10% have been delivered.¹²
- 5,000 new social housing homes per annum would cut the waitlist by 75%.¹³
- More than 80% of NSW voters support increased investment in social housing.¹⁴

HOW NSW COMPARES

- NSW has the fourth lowest social housing stock as a proportion of total housing behind the Northern Territory (14.5%), ACT (6.4%), Tasmania (5.4%), and Western Australia (5.3%).¹⁵
- Per person expenditure on social housing in NSW is the third lowest in Australia.¹⁶
- Following COVID, many jurisdictions have made significant new investments in social housing including Victoria (\$5.3 billion) and Queensland (\$2 billion).
- Current commitments will see NSW deliver only 402 net additional social housing dwellings from 2021 to 2024, compared to 8300 in Victoria and 4300 in Queensland.¹⁷

Read our full NSW 2023 Election Statement and recommendations at: <https://bit.ly/VinniesHousingJustice>

⁷ Zaretsky, K. and Flatau, P. (2013) *The cost of homelessness and the net benefit of homelessness programs: a national study*, AHURI Final Report No. 218, Australian Housing and Urban Research Institute Limited, Melbourne, p.4: <https://www.ahuri.edu.au/research/final-reports/218>; Witte, E. (2017) 'The case for investing in last resort housing', MSSI Issues Paper No. 10, Melbourne Sustainable Society Institute, The University of Melbourne, p.23:

https://sustainable.unimelb.edu.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0012/2756874/MSSI-IssuesPaper-10_Last-Resort-Housing_2017_0.pdf

⁸ Equity Economics, Maximising the Returns: the role of community housing in delivering NSW's future housing needs https://communityhousing.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2021/06/EE_Community-Housing_WEB-SINGLES.pdf

⁹ SGS Economics and Planning, Economic Impacts of Social Housing Investment (2020) <https://www.communityhousing.com.au/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/20200197-SHARP-Final-ReportSGS.pdf?x74234>

¹⁰ Homelessness NSW estimates a per capita share of this investment would see approximately 9,000 of these dwellings (1,800 per year) delivered in NSW. *Ending Homelessness Together*, 2022.

¹¹ Groenhart, L. and Burke, T. (2014) *Thirty years of public housing supply and consumption: 1981–2011*, AHURI Final Report No.231. Melbourne, Australian Housing and Urban Research Institute: https://www.ahuri.edu.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0008/2042/AHURI_Final_Report_No231_Thirty-years-of-public-housing-supply-and-consumption-1981-2011.pdf.

¹² https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2022/apr/16/more-than-3bn-of-social-housing-sold-by-nsw-government-since-coalition-took-power?CMP=share_btn_tw

¹³ Writer, T., Barnes, E., Hartley, C., Wearing, A. Social Housing in New South Wales: Report 2 Future Impact, (2022), Sydney: Centre for Social Impact

¹⁴ Essential Research (April 2021) Results from fortnightly omnibus poll conducted by Essential Research with data provided by Qualtrics.

¹⁵ AIHW (2022) Housing Assistance in Australia.

¹⁶ Productivity Commission (2022) Report on Government Services 2022: Housing.

¹⁷ Pawson, H., Martin, C., Thompson, S., Aminpour, F. (2021) 'COVID-19: Rental housing and homelessness policy impacts' ACOSS/UNSW Poverty and Inequality Partnership Report No. 12, Sydney