



National Member Briefing re Scott Morrison Roundtable

On Tuesday March 28 National Shelter met with Treasurer Scott Morrison and Assistant to the Treasurer Michael Sukkar as part of a roundtable discussing the upcoming federal budget, the National Affordable Housing Agreement (including homelessness and allied agreements), affordable housing and housing affordability.

The roundtable had been a project National Shelter had worked on with ACOSS on having for approximately 12 months and had pressed for since recent news reports regarding cuts to the NAHA. ACOSS also invited some state COSSs to the meeting and National Shelter invited some state shelters and other national housing peaks including Homelessness Australia, CHIA and Powerhousing.

The discussion was led by ACOSS and National Shelter outlining key points and specifically calling for “quarantining” NAHA resources to social housing and homelessness programs while maintaining a willingness to assist any future realignments of NAHA. We proposed a two-stage process initially focused on the budget but requesting ongoing engagement around future alignments, agreements, approaches and programs.

The Treasurer gave an assurance he was there to listen and he was attentive to our points of view. Whilst not providing any specific pointers to what might be in a housing affordability package he indicated there was no new money he could promise towards social and affordable housing or homelessness.

He stressed the importance of state peaks to be focused on Treasurers as well as Housing and allied Ministers and indicated he had had a constructive discussion with state Treasurers the week prior. National agreements are negotiated by central agencies and Ministers, Premiers, Treasurers and Prime Ministers, not by specific Ministers.

Our delegation covered points ranging from the need for tax reform, to increase resourcing for social and affordable housing, support for new ways of financing affordable housing, the importance of reforms to housing and homelessness programs already underway and the general need for all governments to improve resourcing and coordination across a range of portfolios. We stressed the need for a national plan best led by a senior cabinet Minister with the ability to utilize the various levers available across governments at national and state levels including tax, funding, planning, state taxes, land, financing options and the need to include the NfP sector in design and negotiation.

The Treasurer expressed some concern around the capacity of the NfP sector to carry any major injection of funding and we pointed to the ability of the NfP sector to rise to the capacity challenge in delivering NRAS, stimulus housing and financing injections from major banks.

He also identified family and domestic violence responses as a particular concern and a good discussion ensued about the way forward in delivering enhancements to the way we improve services to women and children and families acing domestic and family violence.

The Treasurer identified a range of issues the commonwealth was concerned with including the way rents are set in social housing, financing for affordable housing, the capacity of the NfP sector, the issues faced by many low-income renters in the private market, transparency and accountability of states, possible use of city deals under the cities program, inclusionary zoning and other means of improving housing.

The Treasurer indicated he was interested in the commonwealth's role around the capital component of NAHA while expecting states to fund operational costs. No definitive direction was indicated although it is an insight to how the commonwealth considers responsibilities around NAHA. He stressed that while he was critical of states he did not intend to reduce resources, but with no new money we remain concerned that any new measures in the budget may be paid for by reallocating existing resources which we consider fully subscribed.

The Treasurer asked us to send ideas about the future of NAHA, including homelessness with an emphasis on tackling domestic and family violence and we will work with ACOSS in securing ongoing dialogue following the budget and preparing a briefing paper capturing our past and current considerations.