



INQUIRY INTO HOMELESSNESS IN AUSTRALIA SUBMISSION, JUNE 2020



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Government**

Shelter Tas is supported by the Department of Communities Tasmania.

Shelter Tas is the peak body for housing and homelessness services in Tasmania. We appreciate the opportunity to provide feedback to the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Social Policy and Legal Affairs Inquiry into Homelessness. A National Homelessness Plan and investment in housing is urgently needed to prevent and reduce homelessness.

Our submission focusses on the current situation in Tasmania, including recent challenges and responses to the COVID-19 public health crisis. We look forward to the Inquiry making a further contribution to well-targeted action on homelessness and housing affordability.

About Shelter Tas and Our Members

Shelter Tas is an independent, not-for-profit peak organisation representing the interests of low to moderate income housing consumers, community housing providers and Specialist Homelessness Services (crisis and emergency shelters) across Tasmania. All funded homelessness services and all registered Community Housing providers in Tasmania are members of Shelter Tas. Shelter Tas holds regular meetings with homelessness services and community housing providers across the state.

Shelter Tas is an active member of national housing and homelessness peaks, including Community Housing Industry Association (serving as the CHIA representative in Tasmania) and National Shelter (serving as the Secretary of the National Shelter Council).

Shelter Tas is committed to working towards a fairer and more just housing system. We provide an independent voice on housing rights and a link between governments and the community through consultation, research and policy advice. We seek to end homelessness and improve housing access for all Tasmanians.

Shelter Tas' vision is that every person has affordable, appropriate, safe and secure housing and our mission is to end homelessness in Tasmania. All regions of Tasmania face significant challenges throughout the housing and homelessness sector, as the state faces a critical shortfall of affordable accommodation.

In addition to our usual consultation practices, since March Shelter Tas has held weekly online meetings with the specialist homelessness services and community housing providers across the state. An average of 40-50 participants each week from all regions of Tasmania have attended these meetings, providing a very secure evidence base for this submission.

Shelter Tas can provide additional information on any of the issues raised in this submission.

Executive Summary

As a member and state representative of National Shelter and CHIA, Shelter Tas supports the positions of National Shelter and CHIA. In this submission we focus on housing and homelessness issues that are reported to us by Tasmanian Specialist Homelessness Services (SHS) and community housing providers who are our members. Our positions are based on evidence, experience and consultation with our members, and interstate and national peaks, however, the content of our

submission focusses on state issues and draws on our knowledge and expertise as the state's peak body for housing and homelessness services.

Rates of homelessness are directly linked to the availability of affordable housing and appropriate support. These systemic features interact in complex ways, so Australia needs a national plan and strategy to deliver an integrated and appropriately funded response.

The COVID-19 public health emergency has highlighted the crucial link between housing and health – without a home to stay in, people cannot practice hygiene and social isolation. Tasmania is only safe when all our citizens are securely housed. Housing needs to be the cornerstone of any pathway to recovery. Street homelessness is the visible face of homelessness, but is a small minority of the total population who experience homelessness. Responses to homelessness, including early intervention and long term pathways out, need also to consider the nearly 90% of people who are not visible on the street, but in precarious sharing situations, in cars, in inappropriate boarding houses and the like. All forms of homelessness, and all people at risk of homelessness, are part of a much wider housing market problem.

There is a clear link between rates of homelessness and housing market factors. In particular, if people cannot afford housing, they will face housing stress, overcrowded conditions and the risk of homelessness. The housing market problem is largely a lack of affordable and available rental housing. Social housing provides the best solution to homelessness and family violence, as it ensures a safety net of secure, affordable homes. That is why Shelter Tasmania continues to call for 10% of all housing stock across Tasmania to be social affordable rentals to ensure everyone can be safely housed, with an effective safety net that prevents homelessness and provides people with secure and timely pathways out of homelessness to housing independence.

Tasmania's chronic shortage of affordable rental housing was recognised long before the COVID-19 health emergency. Hobart led the nation as the least affordable capital city, with increasing numbers of people experiencing homelessness. In 2016, 1 622 Tasmanians were experiencing homelessness on Census night, and we know that number is much higher now. In 2019, CoreLogic reported that rents in Hobart had increased by 45.7% over the last 10 years, far outstripping people's incomes and ability to pay. Housing is the highest household expense for people on low to moderate incomes. There are over 120 000 Tasmanians living in poverty.^[1]

Both State and Federal Governments have responded to the COVID-19 crisis with a range of good but temporary measures. The Tasmanian Government has delivered a strong housing-based response to the COVID-19 public health emergency. Renters have been assisted to remain in their homes through a moratorium on evictions and a rental relief fund. Hotel accommodation is being provided for many people who were homeless, without secure places to stay. The Commonwealth Government introduced JobSeeker and JobKeeper income supplements, so that people could remain housed and afford essential costs of living.

We now need the long term response. This Inquiry has a timely, urgent opportunity to look at enduring solutions at the time of unprecedented health and economic challenge. To reduce all forms

^[1] TasCOSS 2018 <https://www.tascoss.org.au/120000-tasmanians-live-in-poverty/>

of homelessness, people who have been provided with short term temporary accommodation, such as hotels, need pathways to long term secure housing. It is vital now to monitor any changes in the housing market, and how different income groups are affected. Levels of unemployment and income support will be critical considerations for how people can afford their homes. When temporary measures are ceased, there is a significant risk that levels of homelessness will increase.

The timely housing initiatives, among other government measures, have averted a much worse health crisis. Tasmania's pre-existing housing and homelessness crisis needs also to be addressed as part of the recovery. The temporary measures of income supplement, hotel accommodation and rental relief funding will all expire, but Tasmania's problems of homelessness and a lack of affordable housing will persist, and hinder the economic recovery from COVID-19 unless they are addressed.

Housing is an essential part of recovery from the health and economic impacts of COVID-19. The stimulus of Tasmanian Government's June 2020 announcement of \$100M to build social housing, along with other construction, recognises the fundamental links between health, housing and economic recovery.

Homelessness can be ended by an adequate supply of appropriate, affordable and secure housing, along with the support needed to help people stay housed. Action from all levels of government - local, state and national - is needed, including:

- A National Homelessness Plan
- An increased supply of public and community housing to provide rental housing that will remain affordable in the long term
- Increased investment in Tasmanian homelessness and crisis accommodation support
- A strategic approach that integrates forward planning for housing with the other key government portfolio areas (including population growth, land use planning and economic development), in collaboration with the community and development sectors
- Strengthening and broadening of Tasmania's Affordable Housing Strategy
- A review of Tasmania's *Residential Tenancy Act, 1997* to improve housing security for tenants
- A National Housing Plan to increase the supply of targeted affordable housing and social housing

Tasmania's housing system

Investment to prevent and reduce homelessness is urgently needed. Housing is at the forefront of public health measures, because people need to stay home in order to stay safe.

All measures for public health and for social and economic recovery need to recognise that everyone needs to be safely housed, and this is far from a reality across Tasmania. Housing needs to be the cornerstone of the recovery.

All kinds of housing across Australia and Tasmania receive some kind of government subsidy, from first home buyer/builder grants, negative gearing for investors, Commonwealth Rent Assistance, and direct state funded social housing, including public housing, and affordable rental delivered by not for profit community housing providers.

The Tasmanian Affordable Housing Strategy and its associated Action Plans deliver many programs, including Rapid Rehousing for people escaping family and domestic violence, Private Rental Incentive Scheme (PRIS) and Private Rental Assistance (PRA) which assists low income Tasmanians with rental bond payments.

https://www.communities.tas.gov.au/housing/tasmanian_affordable_housing_strategy

Tasmania's social housing system assists over 13 000 households with income-based rents. There are nearly 3 500 people on the waiting list for social housing, and the average waiting time for priority one applicants is more than a year.

Tasmania's housing system includes emergency and transitional accommodation for people experiencing homelessness, delivered throughout Tasmania by specialist homelessness services funded by the Department of Communities Tas.

A response to COVID-19 needs to take account of the full range of forms of homelessness. Street homelessness represents only about 12% of the entire population of people experiencing homelessness. The ABS definition of homelessness includes living in overcrowded and precarious situations, such as couch surfing, sleeping in cars, and fitting into other households that become overcrowded. Women and young people are typically less visible as they are couch surfing, or living without secure tenure. In these circumstances they are extremely vulnerable to sexual and other violence and exploitation. The 2016 Census, which counted over 1600 people experiencing homelessness in Tasmania, showed overcrowding was growing faster than any other form of homelessness. This trend accelerates in the economic crisis following COVID-19.

Housing and homelessness are complex issues. There is no single, fast and effective solution to resolving the current crisis of homelessness and lack of affordable housing across Tasmania. An increase of supply of affordable social housing is essential, and, in many cases, appropriate support to keep people safely housed. A collaborative effort to address these challenges is required from all levels of government, the private sector and the community sector.

Overview of the housing and homelessness system in Tasmania

- Tasmania has an *Affordable Housing Strategy 2015-2025*, and *Action Plans* that deliver specific programs that assist people to gain and maintain suitable housing, and prevent and reduce homelessness.¹
- Housing Connect provides the first point of contact for people seeking help. Assistance ranges across the need for help to access homelessness services through to home ownership. The Housing Connect service is delivered by Anglicare in the North and

¹ https://www.communities.tas.gov.au/housing/tasmanian_affordable_housing_strategy

Northwest, and Colony 47 in the South, funded by the State Government through the Department of Communities. **Housing Connect Front Door receives inquiries about all the housing initiatives announced by the State Government in response to the Coronavirus crisis. Before the crisis, Housing Connect received over 40 000 inquiries each year. Each COVID-19 announcement generates a tremendous number of new inquiries and applications to be processed. This adds greatly to the workload of the Front Door service.**

- Social housing is public housing and community housing (managed by professional not-for-profit community housing providers). There are over 13 000 social housing dwellings in Tasmania. **The announcement on 4 June of State Government investment of \$100M to build another 1 000 homes will help to meet the demand, at present nearly 3 500 households are on the waiting list for social housing.**
- Homelessness support is provided across Tasmania through a network of Specialist Homelessness Services (SHS). These highly skilled and professional services help house and support people who are homeless or at risk of homelessness. **Homelessness services are seeing increased demand resulting from lockdown pressures, especially for women and their children escaping family and domestic violence, and people who have been staying informally with others (couch surfing and in overcrowded households) but who have been asked to leave due to social distancing concerns.**
- SHS services provide emergency and supervised accommodation; assist people to find longer term accommodation; support and house people escaping from family and domestic violence, or facing substance abuse and mental illness; and support people to establish themselves in independent living and to maintain their existing tenancies. SHS services also provide specialised information and advice, advocacy and financial support.
- Specialised housing support workers assist people in crisis to find emergency accommodation, help people in temporary housing to find pathways to more permanent options, and support people with information and applications for the multiple assistance programs funded by government, such as rental relief fund, private rental assistance (bond payments), and Rapid Rehousing.
- Additional specialist workers working in the housing and homelessness sector include professionals with expertise in mental health, substance issues, transitioning people who have been institutionalised to community living, specialised support for young people, support for people who are chronically homeless, supportive accommodation options, and financial counselling.

In the COVID-19 health and economic crisis, there is an urgent need to secure additional crisis and emergency accommodation, and specialist workers to support people in the short term, and in the longer term to provide permanent, stable accommodation for people currently homeless or housed in temporary or crisis accommodation. **The COVID-19 recovery and stimulus funding needs to deliver pathways for people who are homeless, in emergency or precarious short-term housing to long term permanent homes.**

The current impacts of COVID-19 on homelessness in Tasmania

Homelessness services have largely continued to operate throughout the COVID-19 crisis. As a sector delivering essential services, work has continued, and increased in many areas. Tasmania's homelessness sector is operating at full capacity with increasing numbers of people being turned away each year. **The average daily unmet requests have reached over 28 per day in Tasmania, an increase of 33% over the previous 2 years.**²

The most vulnerable are suffering the greatest hardship

Already, there are 120 000 people living in poverty in Tasmania. In an economic downturn, some groups are especially vulnerable to the risk of homelessness. These groups include younger people (including unaccompanied homeless children under 16); older people, people with disability; people affected by mental illness; members of aboriginal communities; people in Tasmania on student, worker and spouse visas; and all Tasmanians who are living in poverty. Specialised support is essential for members of particularly vulnerable groups to enable them to live well and stay housed. This includes specialised support and tenancy support for people who are living in their own rentals, support for people living in specialised services such as Youth At Risk facilities and Youth Foyers, lodges, Wintringham models for older people who have experienced homelessness, accommodation linked to mental health support services and the like.

People experiencing digital exclusion are being left further behind. As services and support - including essential government services - are increasingly delivered over digital platforms, many people face new barriers, costs and exclusions.

Workload in the housing and homelessness sector has increased, with more people needing advice and support, new programs, and the need to cope with changed ways of working due to coronavirus. This increased pressure has led to caseloads of over 35, where 10-13 per worker would be considered sustainable best practice, according to standards in other jurisdictions. The opportunity to increase employment to deliver these much-needed services, and embed training to increase and upskill this workforce, would be a valuable form of economic stimulus as well as delivering public benefit.

Some emergency accommodation services are now operating at reduced capacity due to social distancing requirements. For example, shared rooms have become single occupancy, thus limiting the number of people who can be accommodated. It is unclear if, when and how this reduced capacity will be recovered. Social distancing requirements will continue to limit the capacity of some services.

Overcrowding is a form of homelessness that is less visible and less recognised than street homelessness. Overcrowding has many causes, including a lack of affordable housing, so people have nowhere else to go. The 2016 Census showed overcrowding was growing faster than any other

² AIHW Specialist Homelessness Services Collection Data 2013/14-2017/18

form of homelessness in Tasmania. We anticipate this trend will accelerate in the economic crisis following COVID-19.

Overcrowding, housing stress, and precarious housing all impact negatively on people's mental health. It is well known that housing stress, the fear of eviction, and housing poverty can trigger new mental health conditions, exacerbate existing conditions, and prevent, disrupt or delay recovery from mental illness. Lived experience of homelessness damages people's mental health.³ However, overcrowding and "couch surfing" also place people at high risk of violence and exploitation, and can create and worsen mental health conditions. Overcrowded households are a serious risk for transmissible disease, which makes them an urgent public health concern.

While we are in the early stages of seeing the impacts of COVID-19, it is likely that financial pressures will force people to live in doubled up households, where a previously separate household moves in with family or friends. This can lead to overcrowding, where people do not have space for privacy, and can create additional tension and conflicts in the home, especially when the time period is extended and lack of money prevents people from moving on.

Investment to prevent and reduce homelessness is urgently needed

Increasing homelessness will cost millions of dollars each year, and the impact on lives is immeasurable. Based on previous estimates for Australia, increased homelessness can be expected to cost between \$218 million and \$445 million each year, nationally.⁴

A Housing First approach is widely regarded as best-practice for addressing homelessness. This approach prioritises permanent and stable housing for people experiencing homelessness, without making this housing conditional on addressing other health and well-being issues. Housing First has been shown to be successful in helping people retain their housing (88% compared to 47% in other programs) and is more cost effective than other strategies. Savings are achieved primarily through reduced use of high intensity and high expense environments such as hospitals, alcohol and other drug services and psychiatric care, and reduced contact with the justice system.

Housing First models incorporate Housing-led solutions, person-centred support, including choice for the individual, assertive outreach leading to a suitable accommodation offer, and services that specifically focus on addressing wider support needs.

Best practice requires that all services maintain inclusive and LGBTIQ+ and culturally safe environments. There is much diversity within 'the LGBTIQ+ community'. Multiple marginalised identities – concerning sexuality, gender, physical and cognitive ability, race, ethnicity, religion, class, age, and so on – intersect to impact in various and unique ways on people's lived experience. This understanding is relevant to all topics covered in these guidelines. It is important that all services are

³ https://www.ahuri.edu.au/data/assets/pdf_file/0023/29381/Housing-homelessness-and-mental-health-towards-systems-change.pdf

⁴ Equity Economics *Supporting Economic Recovery in NSW* available at <http://www.equityeconomics.com.au/#/copy>

familiar with relevant guidelines for best practice, and that workers maintain professional and up to date education and training.⁵

Many work practices have changed, including:

- Clients who cannot access face to face services but may also lack the equipment, data plans and digital literacy to manage interactions online
- Services are concerned about the impacts of isolation on vulnerable people
- Working with clients and other services by phone or video
- Less capacity in shelters due to social distancing
- Working from home – ramping up of IT, need to upskill to manage different technology and forms of engaging with people
- Tenancy managers cannot visit premises
- Influx of information – public health fact sheets, tailored fact sheets, specific information from contract managers, updates from Worksafe.

The increase in income support has been beneficial, with a reduction in hardship and rent arrears. If these additional payments and protections are withdrawn suddenly, the effects are unknown. Risks include a surge in evictions with fourteen days' notice at the end of the eviction moratorium. This would place incredible pressure on the housing system. Withdrawal of the JobSeeker and JobKeeper payments could place people at risk of mortgage default. These impacts need to be monitored and managed.

- When the JobSeeker payments return back to pre-COVID-19 levels, many people who are self-funding in motel accommodation will be unable to afford it, and they are at high risk of falling into homelessness.
- People are entering leases now on the basis of additional income, and these rental costs may be unsustainable when the additional JobSeeker and JobKeeper payments expire.
- The digital divide will worsen, and more people will become digitally impoverished. People and households who do not have adequate access to internet can no longer use public options, and when these become available, will likely face significant restrictions on access. Students, people needing access to government and other services need home-based access in order to stay safe and connected when may public options are closed.
- People are entering short leases under six months, often where properties have been previously in the short stay visitor accommodation market – it is unclear what will happen to tenants at the end of these short leases. If these accommodation prices rise, or properties return to the short stay visitor market, we will likely see a surge of renters at risk of homelessness.

⁵ Guidelines are available at <http://www.lgbtihomeless.org.au/lgbtiq-inclusive-practice-guide/>

New government programs and increasing numbers of people suffering housing distress will continue to increase pressure and demand for services from the housing and homelessness sector.

Awareness of gender impact and consequences for older women experiencing homelessness

Recent research shows that older women without resources are the fastest growing group of people experiencing homelessness across Australia.

Women live longer in poverty in their later years, and are more subject to family and domestic violence at all ages. Family violence is the second highest reason for people presenting at homelessness services. Older women are increasingly visible in homelessness statistics, and are the fastest growing group nationally. It is vital that the decisions made to stimulate the economic recovery apply a gender lens to avoid unintended consequences that exacerbate this long-term trend of women becoming homeless in later years.

It will be important to analyse the effects of gender when considering appropriate recovery strategies. COVID-19 impacts, economic crisis and stimulus initiatives will likely affect women and men differently. Gendered issues include increase in family violence, and the impact of focussing economic recovery on traditionally male sectors such as construction. Additional employment stimulus in the housing and homelessness sector would go some way to redressing this disparity as this workforce is largely female.

Appropriate Consultative approaches to respond to Aboriginal people experiencing homelessness

People from Tasmanian Aboriginal Communities are over-represented in the homelessness sector. The experiences of people from Tasmanian Aboriginal Communities need culturally respectful responses and appropriate consultative mechanisms to develop and implement community-led solutions. Preliminary data from the 2016 Census showed there were 23,572 people who identified as an Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander in Tasmania. This represented 4.6% of Tasmania's population of 509,965. In 2016, 8% (130) of all people experiencing homelessness identified as Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander. ATSI Tasmanians were overrepresented in all sections of the population of people experiencing homelessness in Tasmania.

Initiatives to address the impacts of the COVID-19 crisis

There are numerous State and Federal Government initiatives, income measures, protections for renters, and additional investment in social housing. Expanded and new programs in Tasmania include:

- Increased funding for brokerage to keep people safe in hotels
- Moratorium on evictions and a freeze on rent increases
- Safe Space in Hobart and in progress for Burnie and Launceston (24 hour low barrier shelter for people experiencing homelessness)

- COVID-19 Rent Relief Scheme (for private renters)
- Increased funds for Rapid Rehousing and the Private Rental Incentive Scheme
- Additional and expanded funding for people escaping family and domestic violence
- Social housing boost of \$100M - announced on June 4

These emergency responses have been extremely welcome. As the recovery commences, we need to plan well for long term durable solutions.

As discussed above, pathways out of homelessness into safe, secure, affordable and appropriate housing are inadequate, and often unavailable. Many people who have experienced homelessness and trauma need more than just a house: they need support to live well and remain safe and stable in their homes.

People's unmet need for homelessness services and homes predates the COVID-19 crisis

Tasmania faced increasing levels of homelessness and chronic shortages of affordable housing before the COVID-19 pandemic. This unmet need is evidenced by long waiting lists for social housing, and increasing numbers of people turned away from emergency accommodation. This has been amplified by increasing levels of unemployment and lost income, and the potential income cliff for people who have temporary assistance through JobSeeker and JobKeeper payments. When people rent privately, the market sets the rent. When tenants lose jobs and incomes, they are still obliged to pay the set market rent, leaving many households impoverished and in hardship.

Social housing (public and community housing), adjusts rent to household income. This flexibility guarantees that rent remains affordable for tenants. Rent that is adjusted to the household income is the best way to protect families and individuals from housing hardship and eviction. But there is a waiting list of nearly 3 500 households and an average wait time of over one year for applicants. **The announcement on 4 June of the Tasmanian Government investment of \$100M to build another 1000 homes will help to meet the need, but the demand will still outstrip supply. The time lag of building these homes means that interim measures will be needed.**

Reforming the planning system to support the building of social housing

The planning system has long needed to adapt to facilitate the timely development of affordable housing. Planning the road to recovery will need to ensure a consistent pipeline of employment and housing supply to keep the economy moving, support our communities and keep people in jobs. We need to respond quickly by reforming the planning system to ensure continued productivity, investment and community wellbeing.

At present the planning system needs to be modernised to recognise the importance of social housing and treat it as an urgent priority. Recent case studies (which we can supply) show developments have been recommended by local government planning professionals but blocked by elected Councillors. This impedes and slows the building pipeline for much needed social housing, in

an environment where housing everyone needs to be a priority for public health as well as people's rights to a safe home.

There are multiple recent cases where local resistance (nimbyism) to the building of new affordable housing and homelessness initiatives presents a significant barrier to new developments. This creates delays, meaning that people are waiting longer for the homes they need, and establishes a 'stop start' flow of employment for the construction industry. At worst, the backlash means that a proposal is abandoned, and a process of finding another appropriately located site has to start again. Better planning, where expert recommendations are followed, rather than overturned by local councillors, will enable consistent employment.

Shelter Tas has long argued in our submissions to Tasmania's State Budget Process, the planning system needs to be updated to encourage construction of the social and affordable housing that is greatly needed across Tasmania. In short, there is a need to cut red tape and fast-track assessment processes to boost the construction pipeline and accelerate new affordable social housing projects. This will create and support construction jobs and allow work to continue wherever possible while avoiding constraints and delays that could undermine government investment in much-needed social and affordable housing.

We note that Queensland has a system for approval of public housing developments that does not require development approval from local government.⁶ Shelter Tas would be happy to see reforms to the Tasmanian planning system include such a measure for public housing and for social housing, delivered by registered Tier One Community Housing Providers when funded by the Department of Communities.

Shelter Tas strongly supports investment in construction of social and affordable housing as a priority for economic stimulus, and to provide much-needed homes for people experiencing or at risk of homelessness.

Conclusion

The first stage of responding to the COVID-19 crisis has been very effective, but these temporary measures have left people in a holding pattern. Shelter Tas calls on all levels of government to keep

⁶ Public housing in Queensland is considered 'accepted development' under the Queensland Planning Act and Planning Regulation. As long as the development is in accordance with the planning scheme it does not require development approval from local government. (See Schedule 6 Part 5 of the Planning Act, proposals for public housing are required to be considered against the relevant local government planning scheme at <https://www.legislation.qld.gov.au/view/pdf/inforce/current/sl-2017-0078>)

The Director-General, Department of Housing and Public Works, makes a determination about the level of compliance with the relevant planning scheme. When a public housing development proposal is considered 'substantially inconsistent with the relevant planning scheme, DHPW will publish notification online and in relevant newspapers, and notify adjoining land owners. Following the end of the public notification, the Director-General will have regard to any submissions received when deciding whether or not to proceed with the proposed development. (see <https://www.yoursayhpw.engagemthq.com/public-housing-developments>)

Information sourced from Queensland Shelter.

housing and homelessness front and centre in the response and recovery. A failure to address housing and homelessness as an essential piece of maintaining public health will put the entire social and economic recovery at risk.

There is a clear link between rates of homelessness and housing market factors. In particular, if people cannot afford housing, they will face housing stress, overcrowded conditions and the risk of homelessness. The COVID-19 emergency has highlighted the critical connection between housing and health. We have seen the rapid and effective deployment of emergency responses to keep people safely housed. We have seen the benefits to people escaping street homelessness, family violence, and precarious and unsafe situations. This Inquiry offers the opportunity to build on these short term solutions and deliver long term secure housing for all Australians. A strategic long term approach, and National Plan to end Homelessness will make the most of the knowledge gained from this crisis.

Shelter Tas would welcome any opportunity to work with the Inquiry for the essential social change that is safe, secure, affordable, appropriate housing for all and an end to homelessness.

We are attaching the Shelter Tas Homelessness Fact Sheet. For additional fact sheets and further information, please see the Shelter Tas website www.sheltertass.org.au .

For any further information, please contact:

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Attachments: Shelter Tas Homelessness Fact Sheet

SHELTER TAS FACT SHEET - HOMELESSNESS IN TASMANIA

Why Homelessness is a Problem

Homelessness is a serious problem in Tasmania that affects people of all ages.

For many people homelessness is temporary, until they are able to recover and stabilise their situation. For others, homelessness can be longer term and difficult to break out of.

Homelessness doesn't just cost individuals, it costs society as well. Studies have shown that for every \$1 spent on housing a homeless person, governments can save between \$2 - \$13 in health and justice costs alone.¹

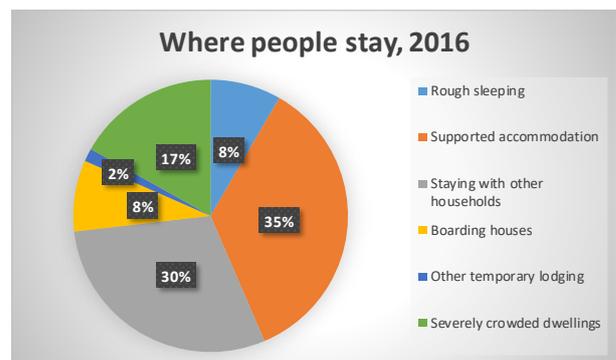
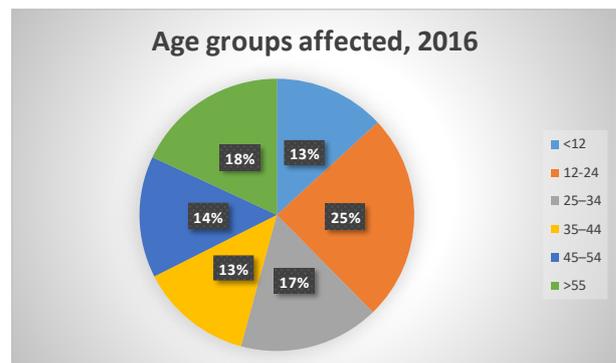
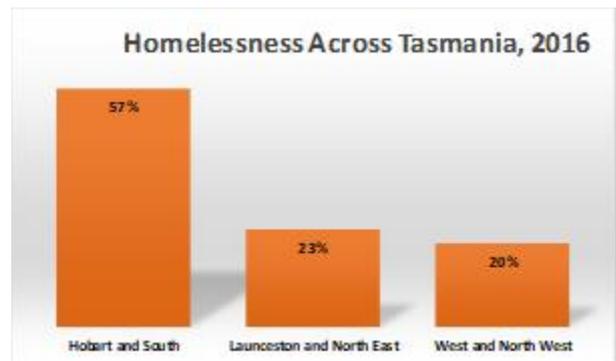
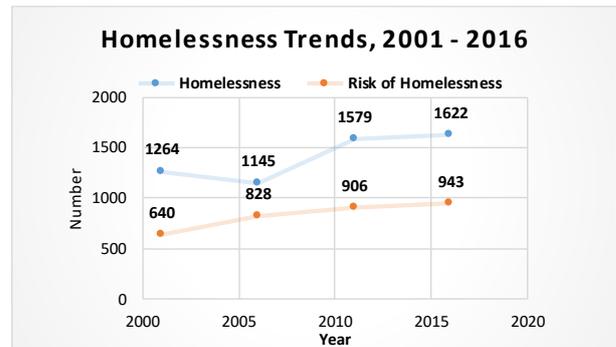
Having a secure and affordable home is a most basic human need and a human right. It also makes good economic sense.

About homelessness in Tasmania

Homelessness has been increasing across the State for over a decade. Census 2016 showed:²

- 1,622 Tasmanians are homeless. Over half are in the south, mainly in Hobart (57%).
- More males than females experience homelessness (58% males, 42% females).
- Most homelessness is hidden. Only 8% of homeless people sleep rough (*137 people*).
- Nearly 4 in 10 homeless people are younger than 25 years (38%). Of these, 48% couch surf or live with severe overcrowding, and 44% stay in supported accommodation.
- Nearly 2 in 10 homeless people are older than 55 years (18%).
- 1 in 10 homeless people are Indigenous (10.7%).

What ABS Census 2016 Shows:²



What causes homelessness?

Homelessness has many causes, which can include a lack of affordable housing; loss of employment; family breakdown and domestic violence; transition from care or custody; mental health issues; and substance abuse.

More than 120,000 Tasmanians live below the poverty line.³ As housing costs rise, it is increasingly difficult for low income Tasmanians to find a home they can afford. Lack of affordable housing is the most common reason for people seeking help from homelessness services (64% of all requests).

As well as being a major cause of homelessness, the lack of affordable housing keeps people in homelessness for longer. More people are also experiencing repeated episodes of homelessness, with returning clients now outnumbering new clients. Extended and repeated homelessness increases the support needs of clients.

Homelessness disproportionately affects young people and children, who now represent 52% of all homelessness services clients. A real concern is that children who experience homelessness have an increased risk of becoming homeless later in life.⁴

Homelessness services in Tasmania⁵

- Homelessness services assisted 6,508 Tasmanians in 2017/18
- Services are unable to keep pace with growing demand. The average number of daily unmet requests for assistance in the last year has increased to 28 unmet requests (an increase of 33% over the previous 2 years)
- 70% of unmet requests are from women
- 43% of requests for help are from families with children
- On average each day 16 requests from families with children go unmet (a 14% increase on the previous year)
- Young people and children are the fastest growing cohort of homeless people:
 - 2 in 5 requests for help are from young people under 25 years
 - 1 in 10 requests involve children under 10 years (12%)
- Tasmania makes up 12% of all unmet requests for homelessness services in Australia, despite only having 2.2% of Australia's population.

Homelessness Support Services

A network of Specialist Homelessness Services (SHS) across Tasmania help house and support people who are at risk of or experiencing homelessness.

Highly skilled and experienced staff deliver effective and professional support to enable people to find housing and accommodation, including emergency and supervised accommodation. Services also assist people with issues of domestic violence, substance abuse and mental illness.

SHS services also provide information and advice, advocacy and financial supports. Some people receive assistance to maintain their existing tenancies, and to establish themselves in independent living.

Housing Connect is the first point of contact for help by people in housing stress, or who are experiencing homelessness or at risk of homelessness in Tasmania. **Phone 1800 800 588.**

Housing Ends Homelessness

Homelessness can be ended by an adequate supply of appropriate, affordable and secure housing, along with the support needed to help people stay housed.

Action from all levels of government - local, state and national - is needed, including:

- An increased supply of public and community housing to provide rental housing that will remain affordable in the long term.
- Increased investment in Tasmanian homelessness and crisis accommodation support.
- A strategic approach that integrates forward planning for housing with the other key government portfolio areas (including population growth, land use planning and economic development), in collaboration with the community and development sectors.
- Strengthening and broadening of Tasmania's Affordable Housing Strategy.
- A review of the Residential Tenancy Act, 1997 to improve housing security for tenants.
- A National Housing Plan to increase the supply of targeted affordable housing and social housing.

Further information is available at www.shelertas.org.au

NOTES

¹ Bennett V, Young A (2013). *Cost Benefit Analysis of the RESOLVE Program*. Mission Australia. Brisbane; Witte, E. 2017 *'The case for investing in last resort housing'*, MSSI Issues Paper No. 10, Melbourne Sustainable Society Institute, The University of Melbourne; Wood, L., Flatau, P., Zaretsky, K., Foster, S., Vallesi, S. and Miscenko, D. (2016) *What are the health, social and economic benefits of providing public housing and support to formerly homeless people?*, AHURI Final Report No. 265, AHURI, Melbourne

² Homelessness Estimates, Census 2001-2016

³ TasCOSS 2018.

⁴ Mission Australia (2016). *Home & Away*.

⁵ AIHW Specialist Homelessness Services Collection Data 2013/14-2017/18

Housing is a Human Right

