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Solving Tasmania's Housing Crisis: the key challenge for Tasmania's next Government

When a new Tasmanian Government is elected in May, its number one challenge will be solving the housing crisis for all Tasmanians, especially for renters earning low incomes, who are worst affected by the housing crisis.

One in four Tasmanians are renting, and most of Tasmania's low income households are renting in the private rental market. According to the Rental Affordability Index, Hobart is the least affordable capital city in Australia, and the rest of Tasmania is the least affordable 'rest of state' area. The RAI measures the cost of people's rent compared to their incomes.

Every day, Shelter Tas members – the housing and homelessness services - see people and households facing the extreme difficulty of finding affordable rental properties in all regions of Tasmania. Across the state, rising rents and low income growth mean unprecedented hardship for many people seeking to rent an affordable home.

All Tasmanians need and deserve a safe, appropriate, affordable and secure home, but for far too long, people have been missing out due to expensive rents and too few homes. In Tasmania we have over 120 000 households living in below the poverty line. Rents statewide have increased by over 35% in the last 5 years, and the waiting list for social housing is over 3 800. These numbers represent too many Tasmanian families and individuals who are struggling with the mental stress and uncertainty of homes they cannot find and afford.

Shelter Tas' longstanding target of 10% of dwellings to be affordable social rental housing will double Tasmania's level of social housing (currently at 5-6%). Reaching the 10% target will provide an effective safety net, significantly reducing housing stress and hardship across the state, and leading to better outcomes for people in education, employment, health and justice.

Tasmania's Community Housing sector is nation-leading, with responsibility for managing approximately half the state's social housing stock. However, the persistence and depth of the state's housing crisis show that a significant boost to housing supply is needed.

The experience of living through the public health emergency of COVID-19 reminds us that we all need to be safe, and to be safe we all need a permanent home. We have seen that the Tasmanian Government can act quickly to support the community. The current *Tasmanian Affordable Housing Strategy* has laid a sound foundation, but was initiated before the current housing crisis took hold. We need to recalibrate the Strategy to meet current demand and plan for the future. Now, in 2021, it will be a vital opportunity for a newly elected Government to undertake sound strategic planning to reverse this long term trend of sustained rental hardship.

As others, such as the Local Government Association of Tasmania LGAT have noted, now is the time to better plan for housing needs, and incorporate housing planning into all policies, including population growth, employment, health and justice. With low interest rates, high unemployment and an increase of demand for affordable housing this is the time to invest in social housing across the state. Shelter Tas supports planning initiatives such as inclusionary zoning. This means designating a proportion of all new developments to be affordable and social housing, and to include the highest standards for disability access.

Shelter Tas calls on the leadership of all Tasmanian parties and candidates to place housing at the centre of their strategy for Tasmania. Whoever leads our state after the May 1 election will need to demonstrate a clear vision and plan to end Tasmania's housing crisis.