

Social Housing

Inquiry by the Senate Economics References Committee

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Introduction

About AHURI

The Australian Housing and Urban Research Institute (AHURI) is the independent national research institute dedicated to housing, homelessness and urban policy. We work with governments, universities and industry to inform better policy and practice. We deliver high-quality, peer reviewed primary research across housing, homelessness and urban policy arenas, disseminating findings to government, industry and the community and creating engagement opportunities with the AHURI evidence-base.

Our core activities are:

- Research – through the [National Housing Research Program](#)
- [Advisory services](#) – undertaking projects and delivering solutions for governments, not-for-profits, and peak bodies
- Policy engagement – including the delivery of the [National Housing Conference](#) and [Australian Homelessness Conference](#)

AHURI research on social housing

With our University partners, AHURI has undertaken extensive research on social housing policy, practice, and outcomes. Links to the most relevant research are provided towards the end of this submission.

We have also provided independent evaluations and assessment of social housing policy, projects, and programs through our Advisory team, giving us deep practical insight into the frontline implications of policy settings.

Our submission draws on this research and practice knowledge to respond to the Inquiry's terms of reference.

Definitions

Throughout this submission we use the term social housing to include public housing (owned and managed by State and Territory governments) and community housing (managed by not-for-profit community housing providers). Social housing rents are set as a proportion of household income.

We use the term affordable housing to describe housing where there is an eligibility requirement and allocation process, with a rent or purchase price based on a discount from market.

We use the term housing affordability to describe a household's capacity to pay for housing costs. We differentiate housing affordability (which can be applied to any type of housing tenure and the housing market more generally) from affordable housing (a type of non-market or subsidised market housing).

Submission

The economic and social benefits of investment in social housing, including its impact on housing access, affordability, renting, homelessness and housing security

Housing is one of the key social determinants of health. Stable housing enables improved health and wellbeing, better educational outcomes, greater capacity for social and economic participation, and greater community cohesion¹.

When the private market does not adequately provide access to stable housing, social housing can provide stable housing and deliver the social and economic benefits that flow from that. For people who live in social housing, investment in social housing positively impacts on housing access, affordability, renting, homelessness and housing security.

Investments in social and affordable housing generally improve social and economic outcomes for people living in that housing, including social inclusion, education and skills, employment, health and mental health, safety and security and empowerment. Securely housing people who are homeless or at risk of homelessness also produces whole-of-government cost savings, especially in the areas of health and justice².

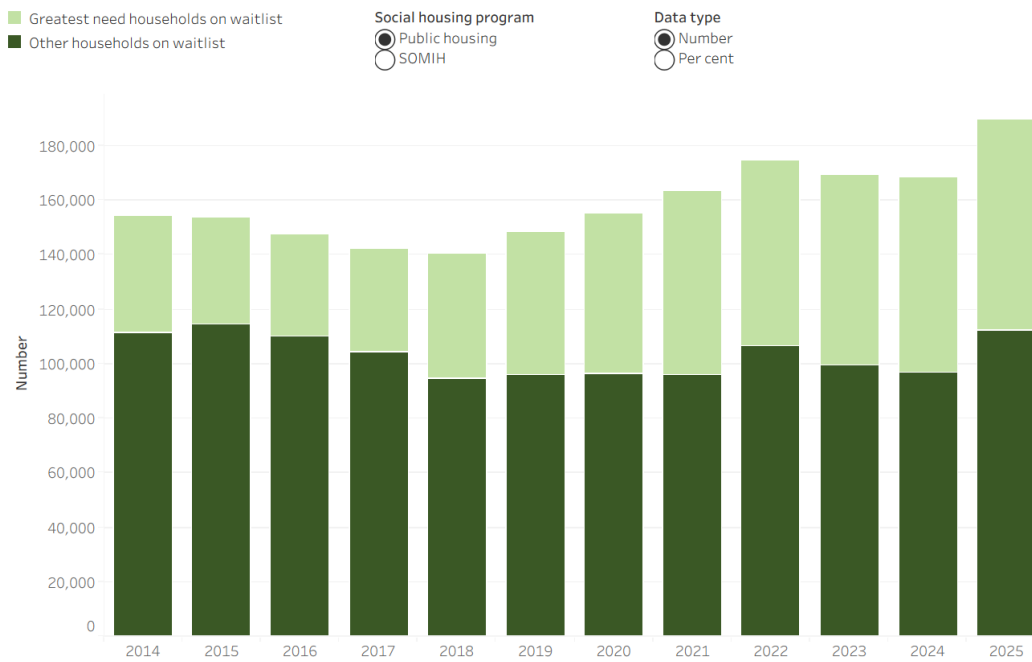
Over the past 50 years, under-investment in social housing means that the economic and social benefits of social housing are less able to be realised. The lack of social housing relative to the demand means social housing has become 'residualised', providing only for those in the greatest need, often people with high and complex needs, and households with very low incomes. As rents are based on household income, this has led to a reduction in rent revenue for providers. There has also been an increase in the cost of delivering tenancy and property management services as it is more resource intensive to help people with high and complex needs sustain and manage their tenancies.

The current amount of social housing in Australia does not adequately provide access to housing, deliver affordability or housing security, or address homelessness. This is demonstrated by growing waiting lists and registers for social housing and length of time on the waitlist, growing numbers of people in housing stress, growing numbers of people experiencing homelessness, and people remaining in transitional accommodation for longer periods of time as there is an insufficient amount of long-term housing for them to move into.

Figures 1 and 2 on the following page illustrate the increase in the number of people on public housing and State Owned and Managed Indigenous Housing (SOMIH) waitlists and the increase in the proportion of households spending more than 30% of their household income on housing costs – a commonly used measure of household affordability stress.

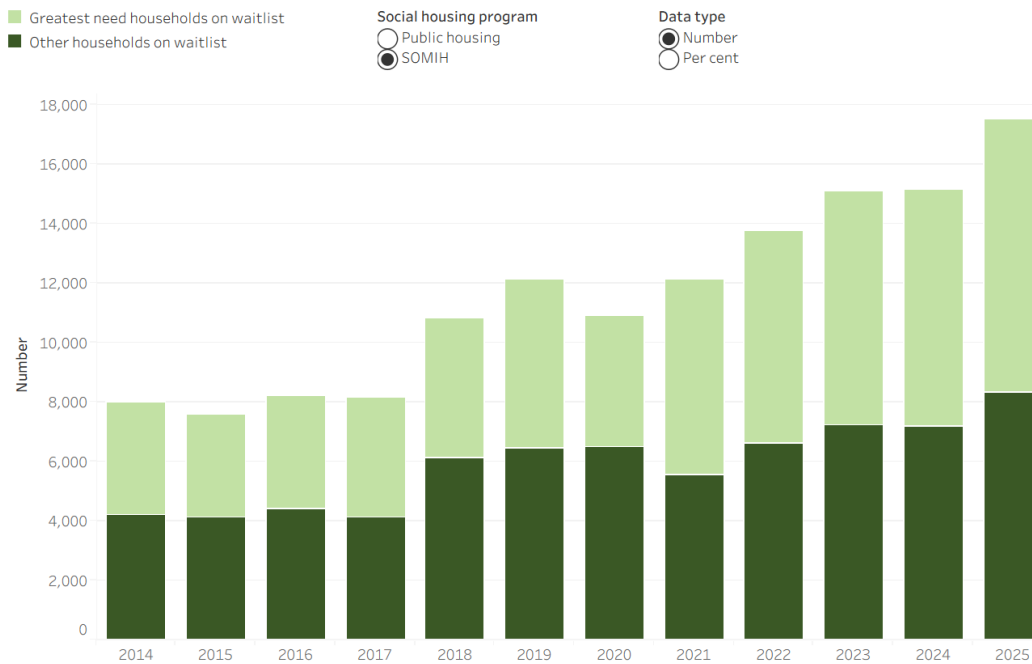
¹ <https://www.ahuri.edu.au/research/final-reports/309>

² <https://www.ahuri.edu.au/services/projects/return-on-investment-for-social-housing-in-the-act>



Source: AIHW National Housing Assistance Data Repository. Supplementary table HOUSEHOLDS.27

Figure 1 Households on the public housing waitlist, at June 2014 to 2025.



Source: AIHW National Housing Assistance Data Repository. Supplementary table HOUSEHOLDS.27

Figure 2 Households on the SOMIH waitlist, at June 2014 to 2025

In 2024–25, an estimated 1.26 million low-income households were in financial housing stress, spending more than 30% of their nett income on housing. One in five (20.5%) households in the rental market were low-income households in financial stress, compared with homeowners with a mortgage (14.7%).³

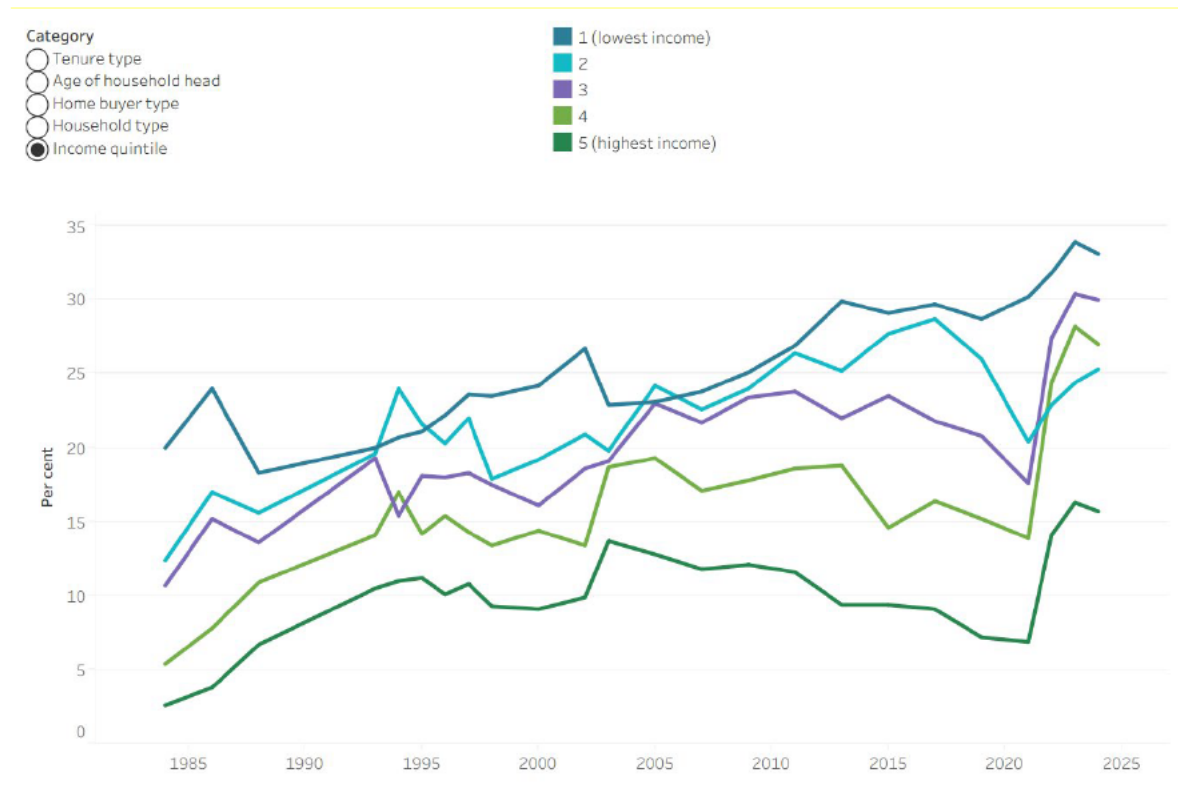


Figure 3 Proportion of households spending more than 30% of household income on housing, by income quintile, 1984 to 2024–25.

To truly deliver the economic and social benefits of investment in social housing, including an impact on housing access, affordability, renting, homelessness and housing security there needs to be sufficient social housing. To achieve that there needs to be sustained government investment into the delivery of new social housing and the maintenance and management of existing social housing.

³ <https://www.aihw.gov.au/reports/australias-welfare/housing-affordability>

Historical levels of investment in social housing, and public housing in particular, including the reasons for its decline as a share of Australia's housing stock

There have been periods of significant investment in social housing in Australia. Queensland was the first Australian government to legislate for the subsidisation of housing before the First World War (1909 Housing Act), followed by various other state programs catalysed by social movements to reduce poverty and address deteriorating housing conditions of lower income households.

Public housing's biggest impact came after the housing shortages of the Second World War when its expanded role was seen as housing for returning soldiers and performing a wider role as a vehicle to advance the economy by providing accommodation for workers in manufacturing industries and ports.

Investment in public housing was seen as necessary to maintain economic growth, and the bulk of families living in public housing had at least one employed household member. Public housing was viewed as either a housing pathway, leading towards home ownership, or an alternative for those who did not or could not choose that path.

From the late 1970s, eligibility for public housing became increasingly means tested, eventually becoming 'a housing form for the poorest population groups—predominantly income support recipients—and for households in high need, particularly the elderly, single parents and people with a disability.' This targeting further increased with the 1995–96 Commonwealth-State Housing Agreement (CSHA) in which the Commonwealth Government placed 'considerably greater priority on ensuring that new public and community housing allocations were targeted to those most in need.'⁴

The residualisation of and reduced investment in social housing from the mid-1970s onwards has resulted in a significant decline in the amount social housing as a proportion of housing stock in Australia, and in the maintenance and renewal of existing stock. The overall decline since 2011 is set out in the breakout box on the next page, with the decline in each jurisdiction set out since 2016.

⁴ <https://www.ahuri.edu.au/analysis/brief/understanding-residualisation-social-housing>

Proportion of social housing in Australia

(From AIHW, [Housing assistance in Australia](#), 23 June 2026)

The amount of social housing households as a proportion of Australian households has seen a steady decline, from 4.8% in 2011 to 4.0% in 2025.

Over the decade to June 2025, the change in the share of social housing households varied between the states and territories. In 2025, the proportion of social housing households was less than 5% for the 4 largest states:

- 4.5% in New South Wales (down from 4.9% in 2016)
- 3.0% in Victoria (down from 3.3% in 2016)
- 3.5% in Queensland (down from 3.7% in 2016)
- 3.8% in Western Australia (down from 4.4% in 2016).

The proportion of social housing households was around 6% in:

- South Australia (5.7% down from 6.5% in 2016)
- Tasmania (6.2% up from 6.0% in 2016)
- The Australian Capital Territory (6.2% down from 7.1% in 2016).

A major factor driving down the proportion of social housing stock is the preference for off-balance-sheet alternatives to direct government development and ownership of housing assets. The cost of construction, together with maintenance liability and depreciation, and combined with the low rental yields of public housing, can put pressure on the budget and impact the ability for a government to show a surplus. With public discourse focused on the headline numbers (surplus/deficit) rather than on economic and social benefits (avoided costs, economic participation, community cohesion) governments experience pressure to avoid direct ownership and development of public housing. The result is a search for off-balance sheet solutions for the delivery of additional social housing, including competitive grant programs that require proponents to secure additional private capital and financing, rather than investment in a steady pipeline of direct government construction of housing.

The case for establishing a target for social housing as a proportion of Australia's housing stock, including consideration of what an appropriate target may be

The amount of social housing in Australia is insufficient to meet demand for even the most basic safety-net function it currently seeks to deliver. Establishing a target for social housing provision would help move social housing to the same footing as other essential public infrastructure, like roads, hospitals and schools, where substantial government investment is expected and anticipated each year.

A target of **10% of total housing stock as social housing by 2050** is an ambitious but achievable target.

Modelling in the report *Growing Affordable Rental Housing: A Cost-Based Approach*, published by RMIT University, indicates that a rate of about 4% maintains the existing shortfall but does not address current, let alone future, unmet need. At 6% the system stabilises but falls short of resolving structural housing shortages. At 8% there is a move towards a viable, self-reinforcing cost-rental sector capable of sustained expansion. A rate of 12% would deliver a transformational, non-market rental system, such as that provided in several European countries.⁵

A steady pipeline of direct government investment into social housing will be required to achieve the 10% target.

Modelling the need

A model can be developed to help determine a target for social housing.

In partnership with the Queensland government, AHURI developed a model that was used to project social housing need. The innovative model was unique in that it:

- Applied both demographic and econometric simulation modelling that used a combination of socioeconomic, macroeconomic, and demographic data (e.g., QGSO population forecast, ABS census data, HILDA surveys, and other economic data sets)
- Used Department of Housing (now DHPW) administrative data and analysis to disaggregate the outputs (e.g., selective social housing eligibility criteria, analysis from the social housing register, and current social housing stock)
- Can generate outputs that provide nuanced detail for Statistical Area 4 regions and household characteristics which can be used to inform targeted housing policy responses.
- Can be updated with new data and potentially be upgraded on an ongoing basis to inform future policy and planning work, compared to other approaches which provide a single point-in-time estimate

A similar model could be applied on a State/Territory basis and aggregated for a national approach.

⁵ https://research-repository.rmit.edu.au/articles/report/Growing_affordable_rental_housing_a_cost-based_approach/33170924?file=67377546

The impact of current Commonwealth and state and territory government investment in social housing, including through the Housing Australia Future Fund and the Social Housing Accelerator, in view of the current scale of need

Recent investment in social housing through Federal and State/Territory grant funding programs is a significant funding injection compared with the decades before. It has slowed the decline and has stabilised the proportion of social housing in the system at its current (historically low) level.

However, even taking into account the existing commitments through Rounds 1, 2, and 3 of the Housing Australia Future Fund (HAFF), it is insufficient to materially increase the proportion of social housing or address the existing need.

The amount of and approach to investment in social housing falls well short of future need.

Other impacts of the current Commonwealth and state and territory government investment in social housing are:

- **It is an expensive way to deliver housing:** the uncertainty of funding, the requirement to include private capital, and the short-term timeframes mean that organisations bidding for funding must factor in the cost of private capital and a return commensurate with the level of risk.
- **It does not provide an opportunity for counter-cyclical investment:** The current funding model does not provide a steady pipeline of housing development that can be ramped up or down depending on market conditions, meaning the opportunity for government investment to play a useful moderating role in the construction sector is lost.
- **It does not allow for capacity building within the sector:** The stop/start nature of the funding rounds does not allow for community housing organisations to build their internal capacity for the development and delivery of housing.
- **It redirects community housing resources away from frontline delivery of services:** Community housing organisations are spending hundreds of thousands of dollars preparing bids for funding for projects that may or may not be built and for funding they may or may not win.

A more cost-effective delivery mechanism would be direct investment into and construction of housing by government. A steady pipeline of work enables departments to build their in-house expertise and create more efficient approaches to delivery (including, for example, Modern Methods of Construction). It internalises the developer profit margin and can help realise housing opportunities as part of other government infrastructure projects.

Governments could run procurement opportunities for community housing organisations to manage the properties and deliver tenancy and property management services for the completed dwellings so that Commonwealth Rental Assistance forms part of the rent revenue stream.

The role of modern methods of design and construction in building more social homes and creating communities with a high quality of life

Greater investment in new social-housing dwellings could provide the stable, substantial demand needed for successful innovation in the residential construction sector.⁶

Innovation in the residential construction sector—and especially technological innovation—aims to improve completion times, enhance dwelling quality, improve the experience of consumers, and reduce costs and resource consumption.

There is currently low uptake of modern methods of design and construction (MMDC) in Australia. Rather than MMDC playing a key role in the delivery of social housing, the opportunity is that the design and delivery of social housing could play a key role in furthering innovation and uptake of MMDC.

Establishing financially sustainable offsite manufacture of housing is challenging. It requires significant infrastructure and up-front investment, which necessitates a consistent pipeline of orders to ensure the financial viability of manufacturers. Manufacturing relies on high levels of standardisation, requires fully pre-established and resolved design, the adoption of specific standards to support building code compliance pathways, and quality assurance⁷.

In addition to these barriers to uptake of MMDC, [AHURI research](https://www.ahuri.edu.au/research/final-reports/461) published this year showed that in Australia, the most significant risk for builders, and for construction output and quality, is market volatility. In both detached and high-rise construction, booms result in supply chain pressures, cost inflation, labour shortages, and project timeframe increases. Competition for labour and materials means task ‘queues’ are prone to disruption; bottlenecks emerge and tend to cascade. Booms also result in the entry of marginal operators and under-skilled workers, and pressure to cut corners—all negatively impacting on quality. Downturns also present challenges including some permanent loss of labour, wage suppression, loss of knowledge and innovation, and builders and contractors leaving the sector.

Market volatility also undermines the viability of volumetric offsite manufacturing, which requires steady, rate-driven production.

Counter cyclical social housing investment can help smooth demand and reduce volatility. Underpinning that approach with a steady pipeline of projects can support innovation, viability, and uptake of modern methods of construction and design.

⁶ <https://www.ahuri.edu.au/research/final-reports/461>

⁷ <https://www.ahuri.edu.au/research/final-reports/461>

The benefits of a steady pipeline of social housing investment for the development of Australia's modern construction industry

The benefits of a steady pipeline of social housing investment for the development of Australia's modern construction industry are significant. A steady pipeline of investment, ramped up or down based on market conditions, can deliver counter-cyclical investment and provide a moderating effect on the market and reduce volatility. This was part of the rationale for Australia's initial large scale investment in public rental housing following the war.

Steady investment in social housing can also provide the certainty and scale needed to drive innovation in the construction sector and improve workforce development.

The barriers to innovation and modernisation of the construction sector in Australia are set out in [AHURI research](#) published this year: *Overcoming construction constraints for the supply of new detached and high-rise housing*.

The case study on the following page demonstrates the value in direct design and construction of public housing by a government and how, as a large-scale developer of housing, governments can drive innovation in the construction sector.

Case study of the role of social housing in driving modernisation of the construction industry⁸

Kāinga Ora is Aotearoa's (New Zealand's) largest social housing provider, with 68,000 dwellings under management. In 2020, Kāinga Ora launched 'Project Velocity', a program aimed at transforming the organisation's housing delivery system. The \$11.2 million project was tasked with developing a detailed construction system that would improve the speed, predictability, reliability, quality and productivity of the sector. The project involved 1,200 interviews and numerous time and motion studies.

Project Velocity confirmed some fundamental issues were holding the sector back. These included the fragmentation of labour and materials, siloed technical knowledge, and tacit acceptance of poor-quality work. Commercial arrangements were also adversarial, with an unbalanced focus on risk allocation and an acceptance of poor behaviours.

A new housing delivery system was introduced, which is expected to deliver over 9,500 homes between 2023 and 2027. These homes are estimated to be built for at least \$820 million less than if traditional procurement methods were used. Fundamental elements in the new system include transparent processes and detailed, to-the-minute project planning. There is also a focus on training and an acceptance of variance as an opportunity to learn, as well as project coordinators who are present and supportive.

A pilot of the new system was undertaken. The average build time for pilot projects was just over three months, compared to a standard of eight months. Financial savings were 13 per cent per home. This is expected to increase over time to 30 per cent, through joint work with labour and materials suppliers.

Many of the reforms look to transform systems of work and supply chains. For example, Project Velocity has trialled a 'Relational Agreement' which will see the organisation take a more active role in shaping interactions between their supply contractors. Another example is the streamlined delivery of building materials via the use of 'room kits'. Packages of materials, containing exact quantities of items required for each task in each room, are delivered to workspaces. Items are packed in reverse order of scheduled tasks, so each item is available as it is required. This system achieves economies of scale in purchasing, maximises productive time available to skilled workers, and reduces waste and theft. Overall, the use of room kits contributed to improving trade utilisation time onsite from 30 per cent to 70 per cent.

Project Velocity suggests productivity improvements are possible and highlights the importance of the public sector in generating change. It demonstrates that systemic changes to housing construction require a bottom-up approach that considers the autonomy of contractors, subcontractors and suppliers. Importantly, Project Velocity incorporated changes to cost and risk sharing, as well as extensive research and development, with learnings being made freely available to developers and builders.

⁸ <https://www.ahuri.edu.au/research/final-reports/461>

Opportunities for further investment in public and community housing, including consideration of direct public spending along with different delivery and investment models in Australia and internationally

The need, and therefore opportunity, for further investment in public and community housing is substantial.

The residualisation of social housing and the associated low rent revenue, means that any investment model will require government funding to be viable in both the immediate and longer term when assets come to the end of their life. Continual attempts to discover new ways to attract private investment into social housing to reduce or avoid governments having to fund social housing, has distracted from the potential to create a steady government funded pipeline of housing and has resulted in a decline in the proportion of social housing.

Changes that would support different delivery and investment models are:

- A broader base for social housing so that revenue streams are improved. This can be achieved when there is a sufficient proportion of social housing to enable it to be allocated not just to those with very low incomes and the most significant need.
- Prioritising the use of government land for the delivery of social and affordable housing and not requiring those projects to deliver market-based returns. Requiring market returns from government land developments means that market housing is the only economically feasible type of housing that can be delivered on those sites.
- Recognising social housing as a form of infrastructure that requires long-term, consistent, and sustained government investment. This would enable a steady pipeline of projects, help moderate market volatility, and support innovative methods of design and construction.
- An acceptance of having social housing assets on government balance sheets would enable direct investment and delivery of social housing. This would reduce the cost of delivery compared with the current grant and/or availability payment funding approach, and provide more certainty for the development, construction, and community housing sectors.

Cost-based rent model

In the sector there is some discussion about a cost-based rent model. In cost-based models, tenants pay rent based on the actual expenses of building, managing, and maintaining the property. Cost-rental systems generally avoid profit-maximising market rents and instead calculate rents based on lifecycle costs, including debt servicing, management, maintenance, renewal and reserves. In terms of the rent charged, a cost-based model generally sits between private market housing and social housing. In the Australian context it is most similar to existing affordable housing models.

Growing affordable rental housing: a cost-based approach is a report for discussion published by RMIT University that builds on AHURI research⁹. It is accompanied by detailed technical appendices and develops a practical proposal for establishing a national cost-rental housing system in Australia. It covers international cost-rental experience; institutional and regulatory design; cost-based rent setting; land and financing policy; tenant affordability and protection; responsible government and sector stakeholders; an implementation and transition roadmap; and the professional and industrial capacity required for sustained delivery.

The report notes that a cost-based rent model would not deliver housing affordability for very low-income households without targeted rent assistance or operating subsidy. Cost-rentals could be affordable for low- and moderate-income households and including some market rate rentals in the portfolio would help cross-subsidise the rent revenue from low-income households.¹⁰

The analysis indicates that establishing the system would require sustained public capital investment, combined with low-cost finance, public land and Commonwealth–state co-investment. Redirecting selected rental-sector tax expenditures could contribute to the initial capital base, but these resources would need to be tied to cost-rent regulation, permanent asset locks, transparent provider obligations and reinvestment in additional supply.

With a cost-based model, the objective is not simply to fund individual projects, but to build a regulated investment system that preserves affordability, retains public and community value, and expands social and affordable rental housing over successive generations.

⁹ https://research-repository.rmit.edu.au/articles/report/Growing_affordable_rental_housing_a_cost-based_approach/33170924?file=67377546

¹⁰ <https://www.rmit.edu.au/research/centres-collaborations/centre-for-urban-research/current-projects/growing-affordable-rental-housing-a-cost-based-approach>

Appropriate governance and administrative arrangements to deliver social housing at a scale to meet current and future need

The key to delivering social housing at scale to meet current and future need is to create a steady pipeline of projects. Direct delivery by government would enable that to be done in a cost-effective and sustainable way. It enables statutory bodies to build in-house expertise with a consistent pipeline of work that can be scaled up and or down to help moderate market volatility.

As with other types of infrastructure, there would need to be Federal and State/Territory governance and administrative arrangements for direct delivery of housing. That may include a separate body for acquiring land and getting it ready for development, departments/ agencies responsible for the construction of housing, and the department responsible for allocating and managing the housing.

In terms of regulation of social housing, there is significant oversight of the delivery and management of community housing through the National Regulatory Scheme for Community Housing (NRSCH), which covers most Australian jurisdictions, and the registration systems in Victoria and Western Australia. A truly national approach – delivered locally to ensure responsiveness – would help reduce administrative burden for community housing organisations working across jurisdictions. It would help enable these organisations to scale up delivery, subject to appropriate funding streams.

Public housing does not currently have the same outcomes framework or monitoring and reporting requirements as community housing. This creates the potential for a “two tiered” social housing system. Adopting a standardised approach for reporting on social housing and tenant outcomes would enable better data on the overall supply of social housing and the economic and social benefits it is delivering.

The efficacy of rent to buy schemes

Rent to buy schemes are essentially a shared equity scheme – with the tenant slowly purchasing an increase in the equity share of the property they live in.

Some private rent to buy schemes have resulted in predatory practices, with tenant/purchasers trapped in financial arrangements that leave them financially worse off and unable to exit from the arrangement. In 2020, some rent to buy scheme were banned in Victoria to protect vulnerable home purchasers from exploitation¹¹.

There is less risk to the tenant/purchaser in rent to buy schemes for social housing, where the government housing department or the registered community housing organisation has protections in place for the tenant/purchaser. South Australia has a Rent to Own program where moderate-income households can rent a purpose built home for one or two years at 75% of market rent before purchasing it.¹² In the 1950s and 1960s, government funded housing development and urban renewal typically included a mix of public housing provision and homes available for purchase by households.

¹¹ <https://www.consumer.vic.gov.au/housing/buying-and-selling-property/buying-property/high-risk-property-investments>

¹² <https://homeseeker.sa.gov.au/how-to-buy/rent-to-own/faq>

While social housing rent to buy schemes can provide a pathway to home ownership for people who would otherwise be unable to purchase a home, they often involve the selling down of social housing assets, reducing the overall number and proportion of social housing dwellings. Building or purchasing new social housing, particularly in established, well-serviced locations, will likely cost more than the revenue received through the sale of the social housing and result in depleting the public capital.

An important policy question is whether the priority is home ownership and the intergenerational household wealth that can come with that or housing the greatest number of people in need. When the proportion of social housing is so much significantly lower than the need, programs that look to sell down social housing dwellings – even when it creates pathways to homeownership – are not likely to support long-term economic and social benefits to the same extent as investment in additional social housing.

Other related matters

Purpose of social housing

There remains a fundamental question to consider – the purpose of social housing. Over time, the role of social housing in Australia has shifted from a housing option for working families and a broad range of people in need who cannot access the private housing market, to an option only for people most in need and on very low incomes. If the purpose of social housing is only to provide for those most in need and on the lowest incomes, then there needs to be a corresponding shift in recognising that such a residualised social housing system will require very significant and ongoing government subsidy for the development or purchase of properties and likely for the operation of those properties too. Eligible households are also likely to require high levels of ongoing support. The search for models that attract private investment to a system such as this, that has low revenue streams and high operating costs, will not be successful.

Support services

Another matter for consideration is the role of and funding for support services in delivering a successful social housing system. When large-scale institutions were closed in the 1990s, many people who had lived in those institutions ended up living in social housing. This created a significant shift in terms of who lives in social housing, resulting in a greater proportion of tenants with high and complex needs and very limited income earning capacity. This further contributed to the residualisation of social housing.

In most jurisdictions, the funding and delivery of support services is separate from the funding and delivery of housing. Often, it is delivered by completely different government departments. This can create circumstances where tenants are unable to sustain their tenancy as they do not have access to the support services that would help them to do so. The lack of social housing also means that many people accessing support services, including people accessing specialist homelessness services, are not able to access stable housing, making it difficult if not impossible to improve their mental health, health, their participation in society, or avoid recidivism.

The result is people churning in and out of the housing system, and in and out of the support service system. This creates an additional drain on resources through more frequent and more complex presentations to services, and increased rent arrears, vacancies, and behaviour that impacts on neighbours and property. This drives further stigmatisation of social housing and the people who live in it.

Fixed incomes and rent setting model

In Australia, social housing rents are set at a proportion of household income. The expectation is that this model ensures that tenants have sufficient household income after rent to afford to pay for other household expenses (food, electricity, transport) and to participate in the community and economy.

In reality, and exacerbated by the increased cost of living, many people on government payments like job seeker, youth allowance, or the aged pension are left with insufficient funds after the payment of even a very low rent to meet basic personal and household needs.

Raising the rate of these payments to ensure that social housing tenants have sufficient funds after paying rent to participate in the economy and the community would increase the economic and social benefit provided by social housing. Increased rent revenue would also be a step towards a more sustainable social housing system.

Select research

Below is a selection of relevant AHURI research on social housing and the topics covered in the terms of reference for this Inquiry. AHURI has a very large database of research relevant to this Inquiry, spanning more than 20 years, which can be accessed via the AHURI website.

Australia's social housing system

Australia's multi-provider social housing system: contest or growth?

<https://www.ahuri.edu.au/research/final-reports/452>

This research examined Australia's multi-provider social housing system and analysed changes over time to social housing delivery. The system includes public housing, managed by state and territory government agencies; community housing, managed by not-for-profit providers; and some housing provided through the NDIS and National Rental Affordability Scheme.

Public housing transfers: longer-term impacts on investment, tenant experience and sector outcomes

<https://www.ahuri.edu.au/research/final-reports/458>

This project examines the long-term impacts of transferring public housing to community housing providers (CHPs) in Australia. It explores how large-scale property transfers have influenced CHP operations, finances, tenant services and outcomes, and identifies policies to support the goals of transfer programs

Small-area analysis and projections of social housing change

<https://www.ahuri.edu.au/research/final-reports/445>

This research explores concentrations and density of social housing relative to local amenities and services across Australia. This provides an overview of the distribution, access and value of social housing stock.

Modern methods of construction

Overcoming construction constraints for the supply of new detached and high-rise housing

<https://www.ahuri.edu.au/research/final-reports/461>

This Inquiry provides the first significant examination of the Australian construction sector's ability to deliver both detached and high-rise housing. It analyses construction workflows, markets, regulation, workforce, technologies and supply chains.

Governance and administrative arrangements

Administering Australian housing policy: practitioner perspectives

<https://www.ahuri.edu.au/research/final-reports/453>

This research aims to deepen our understanding of the design and impact of the ‘machinery of government’ – the administrative, bureaucratic or institutional arrangements that deliver public policy – with respect to housing policy in Australia. Drawing on the insights of current and former senior housing policy officials, the study identifies a set of principles to guide the best feasible governance and policy outcomes.

Fine-tuning the machine: Evaluating machinery of government for housing policy administration

<https://www.ahuri.edu.au/research/final-reports/441>

This research explores how changes to government administrative structures and processes affect housing policy in Australia. It outlines what can be done to reduce some of the negative impacts of these changes.

Shared equity (relevant for rent to buy)

Shared equity programs in Australia: features, impacts and growth potential

<https://www.ahuri.edu.au/research/final-reports/448>

This research looks at shared equity schemes, which are programs where governments or other organisations help people buy a home in exchange for part-ownership of the property. It compares the advantages, disadvantages and unintended consequences of different models, and creates an evidence-base to support the design of future government-led shared equity programs.

Supported accommodation / support services

Inquiry into socially supported housing pathways

<https://www.ahuri.edu.au/research/final-reports/442>

This research Inquiry looked at how to change Australia's housing assistance system into one that supports 'housing pathways'. Housing policy makers often see 'pathways' as how households move between different tenancies and tenures, including social housing and emergency housing. However, it is useful to think of pathways as the different experiences households have with their housing and their housing aspirations and consider how the social housing system can better support households.

Better futures: Supported accommodation for unaccompanied children and young people experiencing homelessness

<https://www.ahuri.edu.au/research/final-reports/459>

This research project examines the effectiveness of Australia's supported accommodation services in meeting the needs of unaccompanied children and young people aged 12–24. It proposes principles to guide policy and practice toward a better system.

Select projects and case studies

In addition to research delivered through the National Housing Research Program, AHURI undertakes projects for government, not-for-profit, and sector peak bodies. Below is a selection of projects relevant to the terms of reference for this inquiry.

Housing economics analysis

Delivered for Infrastructure South Australia

<https://www.ahuri.edu.au/services/projects/housing-economics-analysis>

AHURI analysed the impacts of providing equitable access to secure, affordable, and appropriate housing at a population-wide scale. This analysis was then used to develop an effective impact assessment framework based on evidence of the benefits to inform housing policy and investment decisions.

Return on investment for social housing in the ACT

Delivered for ACT Shelter

<https://www.ahuri.edu.au/services/projects/return-on-investment-for-social-housing-in-the-act>

AHURI investigated whether providing direct access to planned, sustainable, long-term housing options for the homeless population, and those at risk of homelessness, in the ACT is a more cost-effective strategy for the government than relying on crisis responses. The project found that providing more long-term social housing in the ACT has the potential to result in significant cost savings to government. While the costs of developing new social housing are substantial, this report shows that the net costs of investing in more social housing would be substantially defrayed by the avoided costs in health, justice and welfare costs that would occur through these investments.

The Eligibility Trap: Income eligibility limits, work disincentives and social housing in Western Australia

Delivered for Shelter WA with funding from the Stan Perron Charitable Foundation

The report brings together national and international evidence, cross-jurisdictional policy analysis, original income modelling, and new survey data to provide a comprehensive picture of how income eligibility limits are operating, who they are affecting, and what reforms would produce better outcomes for tenants, waitlist applicants and the community. It speaks to the issue of the residualisation of social housing set out in this submission.

The research project was overseen by a steering committee consisting of lived experience advocates, as well as representatives from community housing, tenant advice and advocacy services, the Department of Housing and Works, peak bodies and homelessness service providers.

Together Home Program Evaluation

Delivered for NSW Department of Communities and Justice

<https://www.ahuri.edu.au/services/projects/together-home-program>

In collaboration with the Social Policy Research Centre (SPRC) at the University of New South Wales, AHURI undertook an independent evaluation of the Together Home Program (THP). The evaluation found THP was a well-designed and innovative housing-led program that successfully housed a large number of rough sleepers with high and complex needs during and after the COVID-19 emergency. THP delivered strong outcomes for clients in terms of access to housing and tenancy sustainment, and the enhanced support provided by the program allowed clients to access services and supports from which they were otherwise excluded.

The evaluation found that the monetised benefits of THP are significant but still less than the program's cost. However, it did not put a monetary value on one of THP's key achievements: housing 84 per cent of its clients. In comparison, only about 27 per cent of all people who had applied for social housing were housed.

References

The following reports have been cited in this submission.

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