

## **Submission from Colony 47 to the Consultation on the Discussion Paper for the *Tasmanian Housing Strategy***

*October 2022*

### **About Colony 47**

Colony 47 is Tasmanian owned and operated large and agile social enterprise that has worked in the Tasmanian community for nearly 50 years.

Colony 47 is one of the largest providers of integrated youth services in Southern Tasmania. We work at a state and national level to provide innovative services that help young people to access housing and education, develop vocational and life skills, find employment, and build meaningful family relationships.

Colony 47 is a specialist provider of community driven solutions that support young Tasmanians and Tasmanians who are seeking access to social and affordable housing.

Colony 47 is committed to creating positive change in our community by addressing the barriers to housing, education and employment that are faced by people in our community, and providing them with safe, fit for purpose and affordable housing and support networks.

We are working to create transformative, positive, and impactful change for young Tasmanians, their friends, family, and the community.

We are committed to ensuring that nobody is left behind and that young Tasmanians are supported to achieve their goals in life.

We work to achieve tangible, positive change by working with young people and those at risk of homelessness, from the early intervention stage through to crisis support and everything in between.

We are independent and support Tasmanians from all walks of life.

We also work collaboratively with a range of other organisations to ensure that Tasmanians are supported.

We are community owned and operated and our services are independent of faith and belief systems and open are accessible to everyone.

From our pioneering beginnings in 1973 until today, Colony 47 has been at the forefront of identifying and addressing the complex needs of socially isolated and vulnerable Tasmanians.

We know from experience and research that whilst the roots of disadvantage run deep in our community our role is to support individuals and families to take opportunities that lead to better lives.

Colony 47 is the lead agency for Housing Connect in southern Tasmania and works collaboratively with many other service and housing providers to put the keys in the hands of Tasmanians who are seeking access to social and affordable housing.

Colony 47 is also one of the largest providers of integrated youth services in Southern Tasmania.

### **Our area for advocacy**

Colony 47 welcomes the opportunity to provide a submission in response to the Discussion Paper for the *Tasmania Housing Strategy*.

Colony 47 believes that a long-term vision and plan for housing and homelessness is required if we are to put the keys to homes in the hands of all Tasmanians.

Colony 47 is particularly interested in creating opportunities for young Tasmanians and we believe that the Tasmanian Housing Strategy can play a critical role in ensuring that young Tasmanians have access to safe, affordable housing.

For young Tasmanians this is particularly important as access to affordable housing enables pathways to education and employment opportunities.

By ensuring that the needs of young Tasmanians are considered in the Tasmanian Housing Strategy, we keep sight of the need to provide young Tasmanians with the tools required to realise their hopes and dreams and to become contributing members of the broader Tasmanian community.

In the context of the recovery from the COVID pandemic, we know that there is a need for an intergenerational approach to investments as governments commence the process of budget and balance sheet repair.

It is important to recognise that young Tasmanians have been one of the most disadvantaged groups in the short term as we have responded to the pandemic through impacts to education, vocational training, and employment.

It is also important to recognise that they will also be the group who will be faced with addressing the budgetary and social repair in the years ahead.

On that basis, Colony 47 feels strongly that the specific housing needs of young Tasmanians need to be considered and included in the Tasmanian Housing Strategy so that young Tasmanians are not further disadvantaged.

### **Our Response**

Colony 47 has worked in partnership with Tasmania's housing and homelessness peak body, Shelter Tasmania, to identify the key issues and new focus areas outlined in this response to the Discussion Paper for the *Tasmanian Housing Strategy*.

Through this collaborative approach, we aim to amplify the issues identified by the sector.

Colony 47 recommends that the *Tasmanian Housing Strategy (the Strategy)* include the following issues and new focus areas:

- 1. A Housing in All Policies requirement.** As a framework for the next twenty years, the *Strategy* needs to be aligned with the State Government's current and future strategies and policies, where relevant. To achieve this, the *Strategy* needs to be part of a 'Housing in all Policies' approach, such that the State Government can have an integrated and regional response to housing impacts and housing need from areas such as population, employment, infrastructure, health, education, and tourism.
- 2. A Focus Area for the support needed for people to achieve and maintain successful housing outcomes.** Many people who seek assistance with their housing only need access to an affordable home. Others need additional support and specialised assistance to live well in their home and maintain their tenancy. This area would include support for people with specific housing needs, who experience marginalisation in the housing market (such as people from refugee backgrounds, young people, single parents, people with lived experience of homelessness, mental illness, or disability), and people who need short- or long-term support with life skills to establish and sustain their housing. It is crucial that the *Strategy* and its associated Action Plans recognise the importance of this area, and the funding and resources it requires. If we are building a future where all Tasmanians have a safe place to call home, we need to ensure that the right support systems and services are in place to assist people to find and maintain a home.
- 3. A Focus Area for a Housing First approach, tenant protections and early intervention and prevention.** A Housing First response to homelessness is recognised as international best practice. This means housing people unconditionally as the first priority before dealing with their other needs. This approach ensures that people in housing need are supported with prevention and early intervention pathways that keep people housed. Prevention includes tenant protections and rights, modernising the Tasmanian *Residential Tenancy Act*, and the need to assist people to avoid housing stress and homelessness. Evidence shows this to be a cost-effective strategy. This focus area would also encourage innovative solutions in the support and 'people-focussed' space, as well as the construction space which is well-covered in the *Strategy*.
- 4. The Strategy needs to include the voices of people with lived experience.** To be fully effective, the *Strategy* needs to be informed by the various voices of lived experience and services and practitioners from the housing and homelessness sector. Throughout the life of the *Strategy*, its implementation and Action Plans will be enhanced by attention to the experience of practitioners, providers, tenants, service users, people living with housing stress and people experiencing homelessness, with appropriate support for their participation where needed.
- 5. A Focus Area to build the capacity of the housing and homelessness workforce to match the increasing size of the sector and client demand.** To ensure the *Strategy* is successful, there is a need to focus on the essential frontline workers who support Tasmanians across the whole scope

of housing and homelessness services. The *Strategy* Discussion paper currently overlooks this area. The work of the sector includes engaging with Tasmanians experiencing or at risk of homelessness, tenancy management and specialised support and the Community Housing workforce, and the delivery of housing programs and support and all Housing Connect programs. These workers perform vital roles in keeping all Tasmanians safely and affordably housed. It will be necessary to attract, retain and support workers, and build sector capacity for the housing and homelessness workforce, throughout the twenty-year life of the *Strategy*, and especially with the growth of the Community Housing Sector. Support for capacity building and tailored workforce development (including Shelter Tas workforce program) for these specialised skilled workers is essential.

6. **A cohort-based view.** An effective housing strategy needs to take a cohort-based view to reflect the different and varied housing needs of the Tasmanian community most accurately. For example, for women and children, including those escaping family and domestic violence, a specific ‘trauma-informed’ approach to housing and homelessness services is vital, including trauma informed design principles for constructing homes and emergency accommodation. For young Tasmanian’s, housing should consider access to training and employment opportunities. For young Tasmanian’s, housing must also consider flexibility and agility; the ability for young Tasmanians to move as their initial goals are achieved and new goals identified. When securely housed in homes appropriate to their needs, young Tasmanians have a greater opportunity for increased economic and social participation. To ensure a sustainable and prosperous future, we need to guarantee that future planning takes the specific needs of young Tasmanians into consideration. We would also like to draw attention to the need to provide tailored housing and support to people experiencing mental ill health, and we highlight the Housing and Accommodation Support Initiative (HASI) as an example of an effective program for this cohort. Funded by state government and delivered in southern Tasmania by Colony47, HASI provides integrated clinical, tenancy and psychosocial support, linked in with stable housing and supported accommodation. HASI demonstrates how taking a cohort-based view in the provision of housing *and* support ensures sustained tenancies and the ability for people to thrive.
  
7. **A Focus Area for data and evaluation of the *Strategy* at regular intervals.** Throughout its twenty-year life, the *Strategy* needs to be informed by an explicit, careful, and rigorous approach to all relevant data. This will ensure that changes to circumstances, emergence of new housing needs, impacts such as COVID-19 on the use of homes as spaces for work and education, or changes to federal funding models, can keep the *Strategy*’s guidance responsive, appropriate, agile, and relevant. Current and emerging issues, where better data is needed, include changes in the Private Rental Market (which has traditionally housed people on lower incomes), e-Safety, new uses for residential homes such as short stay accommodation, and changing household formation over the next twenty years. Tracking the net gain in social and affordable properties is essential to monitor the effectiveness of the *Strategy* and its implementation at delivering housing outcomes for Tasmanians.

**8. Support for effective advocacy across the full scope of housing and homelessness policy areas.**

Advocacy for people who use and rely on housing and homelessness services is vital as noted on p 8 of the Discussion Paper. In addition, the *Strategy* needs to recognise the critical role performed by expert systemic advocates such as Shelter Tas, the peak body for housing and homelessness services. As the Peak Body, Shelter Tas provides a consolidated voice for the sector, provides a conduit for information between the sector and Government, delivers expert policy advice and development, and is recognised by Government for the vital role it plays. Linkages with national bodies such as National Shelter and the Community Housing Industry Association (CHIA), and counterparts in other states enable evidence-based advice on innovations interstate and overseas. This systemic work is an essential component of an effective Housing *Strategy* for Tasmania, and this important role needs to be acknowledged within the *Strategy*.

**9. Adequate and sustainable funding for services to ensure safety and good outcomes for clients and communities.**

The past twenty years and recent Royal Commissions have taught us the importance of safety, and the need for ongoing improvements in workplaces, professional, residential, and institutional settings. The *Strategy* needs to be up to date with current best practice requirements, and responsive into the future as new understandings of risks and practice requirements emerge. To ensure a truly client-focussed and trauma-informed service system, recognition of people’s rights, and adherence to new and emerging legal obligations, the *Strategy* needs to be well-informed about both the quality and nature of safe services, and the true cost of providing them. Indexation in funding models needs to account for yearly inflation, escalating costs for insurance, costs for compliance with new legislation, and changes to staffing models to ensure safety for clients and workers.

### **In Closing**

Colony 47 supports the aim of the Tasmanian Government to develop a twenty-year Housing Strategy to “put the keys to a home in the hands of people in need in our community”.

Thank you for the opportunity to contribute to the development of the *Tasmanian Housing Strategy*.

Colony 47 welcomes further opportunity to participate as this work progresses.

We urge you to consider the above issues and focus areas in the development of The *Strategy* to ensure that our young people, and all Tasmanians, have the support and the homes they need.

For further information please contact:

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