



JIREH HOUSE Association Inc.

21st October 2022

Submission from Jireh House to the Consultation on the Discussion Paper for the *Tasmanian Housing Strategy*

Jireh House is a not-for-profit specialist homelessness service in the south of Tasmania. We provide accommodation and support /services to women and children.

Jireh House supports the development of a twenty-year Tasmanian Housing Strategy.

Jireh House 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.
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*. To be fully effective, the *Strategy* as a whole, and this focus area in particular, 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.

4. **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.
5. **A Focus Area on the specific housing needs of women and their children.** An effective housing strategy needs a gendered-lens to properly reflect the housing needs of 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. Currently Jireh House turns away 7 x more people than we are able to help. There is a great shortage of accommodation options for women and children seeking – especially seeking emergency accommodation. We also find that our families that need more than 2 bedrooms wait for longer periods to be housed than families or singles that need 2 or less bedrooms. Housing strategy needs to accommodate for the correct ratios of the entire variation of women and children's needs.
6. **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.
7. **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*.

8. **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.

For further information, please contact

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