



COMMUNITY HOUSING
LIMITED

Written submission through:

<https://tashousingstrategy.communities.tas.gov.au/discussion-paper-upload-written-submission>

20th October 2022

Submission from Community Housing Ltd to the Consultation on the Discussion Paper for the *Tasmanian Housing Strategy*

Community Housing Ltd (CHL) is a national community housing provider, with a portfolio of over 11 thousand tenancies, across 6 States, including Tasmania. We have operated in Tasmania since 2010, providing low-cost housing options to vulnerable Tasmanians. Currently the portfolio of a little of 1700 dwellings is made up of properties we manage on behalf of the State and our own stock. At present over 3300 individuals benefit directly from our activities in Tasmania either as primary tenant or occupant in a dwelling.

CHL recommends that the Tasmanian Housing Strategy (the *Strategy*) address and include the following issues and focus areas. While we recognise the high-level nature of the *Strategy* we have in some instances included practical examples to provide context:

1. Housing in All Policies.

It has been internationally recognized that increased investment in housing has a corresponding decrease in expenditure and improved outcomes on other areas such as health, education, employment levels, tourism, skills availability along with the corresponding increase in public, private and household spending.

- a. All initiatives and projects of any significance should consider the role housing availability will play in their success as well the impact they have on exiting housing supply. Examples are;
 - i. the Bridgewater bridge project and the increased demand for housing due to the additional employees involved, both directly and indirectly with the project as well as the challenges organisations face in sourcing the required skills and staff due to an unattractive housing market.
 - ii. The number of students attracted to Tasmania by our educational institutions.

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TASMANIA

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- iii. Tourism initiatives should consider the impact of short stay accommodation on the housing market
 - iv. And the pressure and ability to meet Tasmania's current population growth and future growth aspirations in as sustainable manner for all Tasmanians, both existing and newly arrived.
2. **Future focused infrastructure planning.** Holistic outlook across all areas to ensure the availability of services which facilitate the delivery of housing stock as well as meeting the spectrum of resident needs.
3. **Dedicated focus on the de-stigmatisation of Social Housing.** The *Strategy* should include a dedicated and clearly articulated component aimed at breaking down the negative perceptions of Social Housing. Some interventions could include
 - a. Focus on mixed use developments which service a broad range of cohorts and income groups.
 - i. Home ownership at full market prices as well as supported home ownership such as equity sharing or rent to buy opportunities.
 - ii. Full market, affordable and social rental opportunities.
 - b. Target home ownership and rental opportunities for Tasmanians on lower incomes in areas not traditionally recognised as low-income suburbs.
 - c. Redevelopment of existing complexes and stock which has become stigmatized and/or no longer meets the needs of residents.
4. **Optimal utilisation strategy,** create a strategy which ensure the long-term optimal utilisation of properties and addresses underutilisation of State-owned dwellings of 3 bedrooms or more.
5. **Inclusion of Community Development.**
6. **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.
7. **Build the capacity of the housing and homelessness workforce to match the increasing size and complexity 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.

8. **A Focus Area on the specific housing needs of different cohorts.** An effective housing strategy needs a lensed approach to properly reflect the housing needs the various cohorts. For example the needs of women and children, including those escaping family and domestic violence, young people or older people living alone. A specific ‘trauma-informed’ approach to housing and homelessness services is vital, including trauma informed design principles for constructing homes and emergency accommodation.
9. **Regular evaluation of the *Strategy*.** 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.
10. **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*.
11. **Mechanism to support tenant rights within the private market.** While State and Community Housing providers are committed to delivering a fair and equitable service, are heavily regulated and open to scrutiny, the private rental market and its agents have been given license to exploit the power imbalance between landlord and tenant. The Tenants Union has proven wholly ineffective in upholding the rights of tenants against private landlords and preventing high tenant turn-over and the resultant excessive rent increases on reoccupation.



12. **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.

We trust the above will add value to the *Strategy* and look forward to seeing the benefits for all Tasmanians. If we can be of any further assistance, please do not hesitate to contact me

Regards

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State Manager