



19 October 2022

Via online submission

Re Tasmanian Housing Strategy Discussion Paper – Consultation Phase Sept-Oct 2022

The St Vincent de Paul Society has been operating across every corner of Tasmania for over a century, delivering support to those experiencing homelessness and vulnerability. This includes emergency relief, but also involvement in the housing/accommodation space as a key advocate around critical areas of need, now and into the future. In working with others to respond to the housing crisis, Vinnies Tas is currently working with Centacare Evolve Housing to assist in construction of housing stock in marginalised rural areas, while also commencing planning around support of future housing supply to support marginalised segments in urban areas.

First and foremost, it is important to emphasise that Vinnies Tas supports the development of a twenty-year Tasmanian Housing Strategy. While recent legislative changes are designed to achieve the governance framework that will ideally enable a refocused and effective approach to housing in the face of increasing pressures, this will be ineffective without a well-crafted Strategy to support implementation of associated programs and projects. We welcome this chance to contribute to develop of the Strategy and make the following comments.

Vinnies Tas recommends that the Tasmanian Housing Strategy considers the following issues and additional focus areas:

- 1. A Focus Area upon a Housing First approach, including early intervention and prevention, plus robust tenant protection mechanisms.** A Housing First response to homelessness is recognised as international best practice. This means housing people is regarded unconditionally as the first priority, ie before endeavouring to support management of other needs. This approach ensures that people in housing need are supported with prevention and early intervention pathways that keep people housed. Prevention includes assisting people to avoid housing stress and homelessness, while also upholding tenant protections and rights. That must be facilitated through modernisation of the Tasmanian *Residential Tenancy Act*. Evidence shows that these are cost-effective strategies. This focus area would also encourage innovative solutions in enabling support and also delivery of ‘people-focussed’ spaces. To be fully effective, the Strategy as a whole, and this focus area in particular, needs to be informed and underpinned by the voices of those with lived experience, combined with the perspectives of those delivering services ie 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.
- 2. A Focus Area that considers 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. However others need various elements of additional ‘wrap around’ support and specialised assistance to live well in their home and to maintain their occupancy. This includes support for people with specific housing needs, particularly those who experience marginalisation in the housing market (eg those from refugee backgrounds, young people, single parents, mental illness or disability). An effective Strategy will also consider people who need short- or long-term support, offering development of 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 that addresses the need to build capacity of the housing and homelessness workforce in order 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. This is an area where Vinnies Tas sees the growing need every day. *This is the area where added scaffolding of people is required to support the infrastructure of properties.* The Strategy Discussion paper currently overlooks this area. The work of the sector includes engaging with Tasmanians experiencing or at risk of homelessness, provision of emergency relief, delivery of short/long term and transitional housing solutions, tenancy management and the specialised support offered through the Community Housing workforce. This includes delivery of housing programs and support across all Housing Connect programs and intersecting with a very broad range of not for profit providers. Every one of these entities engages workers (and in many cases volunteers) to 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, especially given the growth of the Community Housing Sector. Support for capacity building and tailored workforce development (eg the Shelter Tas workforce program) for these specialised skilled workers is essential. There is a need for planning and engagement with a broad range of employers in this area, with long-term outcomes in mind. Fundamentally, a housing first model without an associated workforce strategy cannot succeed.
- 4. A Focus Area on the specific housing needs of women and their children.** An effective housing Strategy also needs to encompass a gendered-lens to properly reflect the unique 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. The aspects that this touches on are broad-ranging, from trauma informed design principles for construction of homes to emergency accommodation and programs designed to transition empowered women and children toward safety, security and independence.
- 5. 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 which considers and responds to all relevant data with a future forward, planned approach. This will ensure that changes to circumstances, emergence of new housing needs, impacts (such as those that arose via COVID-19) are considered in relation to the use of homes as spaces for work and education. Such an approach will also enable swift and strategic responses that may arise following changes to federal funding models. Inclusion of this focus area can keep the Strategy's guidance responsive, appropriate, agile and relevant. By way of example, 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 will be essential to monitoring the effectiveness of the Strategy and its implementation in seeking to deliver improved housing outcomes for Tasmanians.
- 6. Adequate and sustainable funding for services to ensure not only fundamental safety but also good outcomes for clients and communities.** The past twenty years and recent Royal Commissions have taught us the overriding importance of safety and compliance with standards. There is now greater recognition of the need for ongoing improvements in workplaces, professional, residential and institutional settings. The Strategy needs to be abreast of current best practice requirements, and responsive into the future as new understandings of risks and practice requirements emerge. To ensure delivery of a truly person-focussed and well-informed service system which recognises people's rights and compliance with new and emerging obligations, the Strategy must continue to be well-informed about both the quality and nature of safe services, together with the true cost of providing these. Indexation in funding models needs to account not only for annual inflation, but also escalating costs of insurance, costs of compliance with new legislation, and associated changes to staffing models which ensure safety for clients and workers.
- 7. A Housing in All Policies requirement.** To assist effective implementation of an impactful framework for the next twenty years that touches on all relevant areas, the Strategy must be aligned with the State Government's current and future strategies and policies, wherever these intersect. To achieve this, the Strategy needs to be part of a 'Housing in all Policies' approach so that the Government can implement and oversee an integrated and regional response to housing impacts and housing need from areas such as population, employment, infrastructure, health, education and tourism.

8. **Support for effective advocacy across the full scope of housing and homelessness policy areas.** As a final and fundamental point, it should be acknowledged that advocacy for people who use and rely on housing and homelessness services is vital. While noted on in the Discussion Paper, the Strategy needs to recognise the critical role performed by expert systemic advocates such as Shelter Tas, together with the voice of others who work at the grassroots of supporting the homeless and housing sector. For example, as a peak body, Shelter Tas provides a consolidated voice for the sector, delivers a conduit for information between the sector and Government, offers 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, which acknowledges engagement throughout the wider sector, is an essential component of an effective Housing Strategy for Tasmania. This important role must be acknowledged within the Strategy.

For further information around this submission, please contact Heather Kent, CEO, St Vincent de Paul Society of Tasmania (heather.kent@vinniestas.org.au).

Sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Heather Kent', with a stylized flourish extending to the right.

Heather Kent
Chief Executive Officer