

CHECK OUT

CCJP

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Rent Crisis

Australia is facing an ongoing, long-term shortage of affordable rental housing. This shortage has worsened in the past five years as the booming economy has forced demand for housing up and the supply has not kept pace. While the recent economic downturn has led to some easing of this pressure, it has not come close to solving the problem.

Some key elements of the **Rent Crisis** are:

- There are at least 600,000 families and singles in the private rental market in **housing stress** (paying more than 30% of their income in rent). This represents 65% of low income private renters
- **Commonwealth Rent Assistance (CRA)** is received by approximately one million people. Despite this financial assistance, approximately 35% of the recipients remain in housing stress
- More than 105,000 people are **homeless** on any given night
- Approximately 180,000 households were on **waiting lists** for public rental housing at 30 June 2007
- Despite this demand, Commonwealth funding for public and non-profit housing has **fallen** by around 30% in real terms since 1996. The supply of public housing has declined by approximately 30,000 dwellings between 1996 and 2006 (from 372,000 to 341,000 dwellings). This has resulted in **tighter targeting and shorter tenure periods** in many states and territories.

It is clear that current programs are not coping with the level of need that is present in the community and that more needs to be done.

Social Housing

There are around 389,000 social housing dwellings in Australia including public housing, government owned and managed Indigenous housing, government-subsidized community housing and crisis accommodation program dwellings.

The number of people on social housing waiting lists has fallen over the last ten years. The major reasons for this have been tightening of eligibility criteria and reviews of the status of previous applicants. Even so, **there are 225,000 applicants waiting for social housing.** Social housing is an important provider of housing to **people with disabilities.** Australia-wide, 29% of public housing tenants have a disability.

National Shelter Vision

That all Australians, including those on low incomes, will have access to housing which is:

- **Affordable**, so that no low income household will have to pay more than 30% of its income on housing
- **Adequate**, meeting minimum standards for space, safety and physical condition
- **Secure**, so that households who adhere to basic occupancy conditions (such as those set out in tenancy legislation) don't have to leave unless they choose to do so
- **Appropriate**, meeting particular needs at different stages of the lifecycle and meeting the need for disability access
- **Well located**, with access to employment, services and transport networks
- **Sustainable**, both for them as individuals and for the environment.

What Is National Shelter?

National Shelter is the national peak non-government organisation representing the interests of low-income housing consumers and has been in operation since 1976. National Shelter cooperates closely with other national bodies such as ACOSS and the National Community Housing Forum and aims to improve housing access for people who are on low incomes or who face disadvantage in the housing system. It works towards this goal by influencing government policy and action and by raising community awareness in relation to housing.

GOOD NEWS

The current Federal Government has provided some good news regarding housing in 2009. It has appointed a **Minister for Housing** - Tanya Plibersek MP, Member for Sydney.

It has signed the **National Affordable Housing Agreement (NAHA)** and allocated significant funding to its implementation in the recent Federal budget.

The NAHA is an agreement by the [Council of Australian Governments \(COAG\)](#) that commenced on 1 January 2009, initiating a whole-of-government approach in tackling the problem of housing affordability.

The NAHA provides \$6.2 billion worth of housing assistance to low and middle income Australians in the first five years. The NAHA is supported by the National Partnership Agreements on:

- ◆ Social housing
- ◆ Homelessness
- ◆ Indigenous Australians living in remote areas

(More details at www.coag.gov.au/intergov_agreements)

BUT MORE NEEDS TO BE DONE

National Shelter recommends that the NAHA should have a growth target of 30,000 additional social housing dwellings by 2012. This would require \$7.5b from all levels of government over four years to **expand the supply of urgently needed social housing**.

There is a need for an urgent review of the **Commonwealth Rent Assistance (CRA)** to address among other things the possibility of indexing the CRA to the CPI. An immediate 30% increase in the CRA for households receiving the maximum rate is needed to reduce significant housing stress.

ACTION

Write to the Minister for Housing now, congratulating her on what is being done but suggesting that the steps above are essential in the current situation of crisis.

THE TENANTS' UNION

The website of the Tenants' Union of NSW and the network of Tenants Advice and Advocacy Services throughout New South Wales (details below) is where you can find out about:

- ◆ [your rights and responsibilities](#) as a tenant
- ◆ where to get [tenancy advice](#)
- ◆ the Tenants' Union's [policy and law reform](#) work
- ◆ the latest [news](#) about rental housing.

The information on this site is for all tenants in New South Wales, including tenants of private rental housing, social housing, boarding and lodging houses and residential parks.

THE CRISIS IN HOUSING FOR INDIGENOUS AUSTRALIANS

Many of Australia's Indigenous people are living in 3rd World conditions. Their desperate housing needs are the result of many years of neglect by all levels of government. Remote communities in the Northern Territory have been highlighted in the activities surrounding the NT Intervention by the previous and current federal governments, but there are Indigenous communities in need throughout Australia.

Indigenous housing is the responsibility of the Federal Minister for Indigenous Affairs, Jenny Macklin, not the Minister for Housing, Tanya Plibersek. While the Minister for Housing is working towards a greater role for the community sector in the provision and management of social housing, the Minister for Indigenous Affairs is assuming greater government control, with a significant lack of consultation with affected communities.

Lease agreements with the Federal government are being demanded of Indigenous communities before housing is provided, leading to community fears about losing control of their traditional land. The land councils and existing Indigenous housing corporations are being by-passed instead of being resourced to become the managers of Indigenous housing.

The Minister is threatening to take control of the town camps around Alice Springs because the Tangentyere Land Council is unhappy with her terms for providing housing. In the Northern Territory the government is planning to focus its housing assistance in major centres, ignoring remote communities. This will lead to social dislocation, overcrowding and homelessness in complete contrast to one of the aims of the NAHA to 'make a major contribution towards closing the gap in Indigenous disadvantage'.

ACTION

Write to Jenny Macklin, Minister for Indigenous Affairs, urging her to listen to the concerns of Indigenous people about the housing needs of their communities

Write to Paul Henderson, Chief Minister of the Northern Territory, urging the reversal of a policy which threatens to destroy the NT remote communities.

(more information at: www.antar.org.au)

Information for this Checkout came from the sources below, where more information can also be found:

National Shelter: www.shelter.org.au

Australia Fair: www.australiafair.org.au

Tenant's Union: www.tenants.org.au
National ANTaR: www.antar.org.au

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