

Open Letter to Mark McGowan, Premier of Western Australia

6 May 2021

Dear Premier,

We write to you as CEOs from the Housing Emergency Response Group, to convey our acute concern with the housing crisis, which has been made more pronounced as a result of the ending of the moratorium on evictions and rent increases. The Housing Emergency Response Group is formed by organisations that provide emergency relief funding, support to renters in the private rental market, and peak bodies to chart a path to mitigate the impact of the residential moratorium's end.

The housing system has been in crisis for some time. There are now almost 16,000 households on the social housing waitlist. The availability and affordability of private rentals is at a historic low. The recent Anglicare Rental Affordability Snapshot showed that there was just one property available for rent for a low-income family in the whole of WA.

Since the lifting of the COVID-19 moratorium at the end of March 2020 the housing crisis has increased significantly. One service has reported a 500% increase in demand, with desperate families about to lose their homes having nowhere to go. Along with the acute distress of people contacting services, this is taking a dramatic toll on the health and wellbeing of frontline staff.

The Housing Emergency Response Group wish to convey, in the strongest of terms, that

1. **The emerging housing crisis demands a whole of government response.**
2. **The immediate priority must be:**
 - a. **Supporting people (financially) to remain in their rental homes; and**
 - b. **Ensuring people who have had to leave their rental home are not exiting into homelessness.**
3. **Services are seeing increasing levels of requests from people who cannot pay their rent and/or are being evicted and cannot find an affordable home.**
4. **There is acute concern for the welfare of children and women living in a family and domestic violence situation which they cannot escape.**
5. **The current situation is placing an increasing number of renters and renter households, including children, at greater risk of mental ill health effects.**
6. **Services have significant concern about the ongoing mental health impact on staff responding to an overwhelming increase in demand and who are unable to provide housing options for people who are presenting with acute levels of stress, and a sense of hopelessness; and**
7. **An urgent government response is needed to prevent a new wave of homelessness, housing insecurity, and increased mental health issues, due to the stress placed on individuals and families not being able to find a place to live.**

We are calling on government to focus on four priority areas:

1. An Emergency Welfare Response to the impact of the ending of the rental moratorium.

- We are calling for a constructive, open and evidence-based dialogue by government with the community sector which includes sharing of evidence, information and solutions being progressed to mitigate the impact of the ending of the moratorium on housing stress.

2. Surety of emergency relief funding to support people to remain in their rental homes.

The Residential Relief Grants Scheme is a positive initiative, but eligibility requirements mean many people are falling between the cracks.

We are calling for surety of ongoing Emergency Relief funding that enables services to support households to clear rental debt and pay current rent for a six-to-twelve-month period. Increased service delivery to people who need assistance of assessment and direct referral to housing and support services, financial support and accommodation options that might be available. Also, for investment into mental health support for tenants.

3. Urgent identification and provision of housing and short to medium term accommodation options to ensure people who have had to leave their rental property are not exiting into homelessness.

We are calling for:

- A list and access to suitable, available government housing and accommodation options that could be utilised to provide immediate accommodation for households.
- Surety of emergency relief funding over the next six to twelve months to support people into medium-term housing options, with support from services as required, including the development of an exit strategy into permanent housing.
- The spot purchases of vacant apartments for use as affordable rental homes, managed by the community housing sector.
- The utilisation of suitable, vacant government land and the rapid construction of modular homes to immediately increase affordable housing options, in partnership with the community housing sector.
- Further reforms to planning and zoning to allow the private sector to more speedily provide a variety of housing options in locations where people can access employment, which will allow for more housing at a more affordable price.

4. A joint meeting with the Ministers for Housing, Communities and Commerce to discuss a co-ordinated housing and service response during this period.

Premier, your success and hard work over the COVID pandemic to keep Western Australians safe is strongly commended.

COVID-19 has showed the importance of having a home to keep everybody safe and well. Housing is the foundation for a safe, strong and stable society, and a provides the platform for opportunity for all West Australians.

Housing construction, maintenance and service support creates jobs. Housing is the foundation to maintain a job. We look forward to your government's urgent response.

Signed,

Mark Glasson
Chief Executive Officer
Anglicare WA



Tony Pietropiccolo AM
Director
Centrecare Inc



Sara Kane
Chief Executive Officer
Circle Green Community Legal



Melanie Every
Executive Officer
Financial Counsellors Association of
WA



Chris Smith
Chief Executive Officer
Foundation Housing



Neville Pozzi
Chief Executive Officer
Real Estate Institute of Western
Australia



Michelle Mackenzie
Chief Executive Officer
Shelter WA



Taryn Harvey
Chief Executive Officer
WA Association of Mental Health



Louise Giolitto
Chief Executive Officer
WA Council of Social Service

