

Infrastructure Australia
Online submission

23 May 2022

Submission to 2022 Regional Strengths and Infrastructure Gaps

Thank you for the opportunity to make a submission on this important report. Shelter WA is the independent peak body in Western Australia that advocates for social and affordable housing and ending homelessness. Shelter WA drives change by facilitating collaboration amongst those who have an impact on housing, while providing evidence-based policy, advice, engagement, representation and strong advocacy for an effective housing system. Shelter WA believes that everyone has a right to a place to call home.

Shelter WA position

Shelter WA were pleased to see **'availability, diversity and affordability of housing'** included as a topic area in the 2022 report and note that this was identified as an infrastructure gap in five of the eight Regional Development Australia (RDA) regions in Western Australia (WA).

A growing body of evidence has shown that 'one size fits all' approaches to housing policy have not worked in the regional Australian context and place-based, long-term and coordinated planning for housing needs to be undertaken in regional areas as a priority.

Housing is a social determinant of health and the elements of suitability, affordability and tenure have found to impact on health¹. It also boosts economic productivity² through economic participation and mobility. For these reasons, the availability, diversity and affordability of housing should be viewed as vital infrastructure and a **nationally significant priority**.

Shelter WA in regional Western Australia

Shelter WA has members across regional WA and is currently developing a Regional Engagement Framework, funded through Lotterywest³. WA is the most capital city centralised state in Australia, with 78.3% of the WA population living in the Perth metropolitan area⁴ and large distances between centres present service challenges.

Many regional WA programs or initiatives (including ours) rely on grant funding, making them project based and time-limited. Despite this, increasing research is finding that regional areas require long-term, objective-focused strategic planning that is place-based⁵.

Housing in regional Western Australia

Housing pressures in regional WA are long-standing but have been exacerbated by recent trends such as population growth into regional Australia⁶. Regional WA has entrenched disadvantage and most inland locations experience multi-layered disadvantage. According to the 2021 Dropping off the Edge (DOTE) report⁷ all 10 of the most disadvantaged locations in WA are regional. The latest available figures show the housing situation is worsening in regional WA.



The Regional Australia Institute’s latest report ‘Building the Good Life: Foundations of Regional Housing’ found that ‘one size fits all’ policy approaches have resulted in a worsening of the housing issues facing rural and regional Australia. They found distinct regional housing markets in Australia and a need to respond accordingly to avoid further escalation of the current pressures⁸.

A higher proportion of people rent in the WA regions compared to Perth metropolitan area. In Greater Perth 26.7% of households rent⁹, compared to 34.7% in the rest of WA¹⁰. In regions such as Outback – North (Kimberley / Pilbara) it is reported as 72.7%¹¹. Anglicare WA’s recently released annual Rental Affordability Snapshot found rising rents and housing stress were compounded by the rising costs of other essentials across WA¹². Of the two regions analysed, WA’s North West worsened from the previous year.

A report by UNSW found a clear sentiment amongst leading economists that there is now significant under-investment in affordable rental housing and that stimulus action is urgently needed to channel community housing investment towards low-income workers close to jobs¹³.

Regional social housing waitlists are also worsening, with recently released figures showing an increase in the waitlist across all regions from 30 April 2021 to 31 March 2022.

Region	31 March 2022		30 April 2021
	Wait turn	Priority	Wait turn
Great Southern	615	173	539
South West	1,329	156	1,201
Goldfields	545	93	451
Midwest / Gascoyne	1,065	185	924
Pilbara	750	254	730
East / West Kimberley	1,191	272	1,138
Wheatbelt	366	75	333

Key recommendations in Infrastructure WA’s draft State Infrastructure Strategy ‘Foundations for a Stronger Tomorrow’ are that social and affordable housing needs to have improved planning, be prioritised for investment and offer diversified choice. Housing is recognised as critical economic and social infrastructure needed to support regional development. It also recommends improved Aboriginal housing outcomes¹⁴.

Conclusion

Thank you again for the opportunity to provide feedback on the 2022 Regional Strengths and Infrastructure Gaps report. It is essential that affordable housing in regional WA is viewed as critical infrastructure and is given the resources to be addressed. Shelter WA would welcome the opportunity to provide further input should this be required.

Yours sincerely,



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- ² SGS Economics (2018) Is social and affordable housing economic infrastructure? Accessed from: <https://www.sgsep.com.au/assets/main/SGS-Economics-and-Planning-Housing-Social-Infrastructure.pdf>
- ³ Shelter WA (2022) Regional WA. Accessed from: https://www.shelterwa.org.au/our-work/advocacy/regional_wa
- ⁴ Profile ID (2014) Population trends: How centralised is Australia's population. Accessed from: <https://blog.id.com.au/2014/population/demographic-trends/how-centralised-is-australias-population/>
- ⁵ AHURI (2022) Understanding the lived experience and benefits of regional cities. May 2022 Accessed from: <https://www.ahuri.edu.au/sites/default/files/documents/2022-05/AHURI-Final-Report-377-Understanding-the-lived-experience-and-benefits-of-regional-cities.pdf>
- ⁶ Commonwealth of Australia (2022) Regional population. Accessed from: <https://www.abs.gov.au/statistics/people/population/regional-population/2020-21>
- ⁷ Jesuit Social Services (2021) Dropping Off the Edge 2021. Accessed from: <https://www.dote.org.au/>
- ⁸ RAI (2022) Building the Good Life: Foundations of Regional Housing. May 2022. Regional Australia Institute. Accessed from: <https://www.regionalaustralia.org.au/common/Uploaded%20files/Files/Building%20the%20Good%20Life%20Foundations%20of%20Regional%20Housing%20FINAL.pdf>
- ⁹ Commonwealth of Australia (2022) 2016 ABS Region Summary: Greater Perth. Accessed from: <https://dbr.abs.gov.au/region.html?lyr=gccsa&rgn=5GPER>
- ¹⁰ Commonwealth of Australia (2022) 2016 ABS Region Summary: Rest of WA. Accessed from: <https://dbr.abs.gov.au/region.html?lyr=gccsa&rgn=5RWAU>
- ¹¹ Commonwealth of Australia (2022) 2016 ABS Region Summary Western Australia – Outback North. Accessed from: <https://dbr.abs.gov.au/region.html?lyr=sa4&rgn=510>
- ¹² Anglicare WA (2022) Rental Affordability Snapshot 2022. Accessed from: <https://www.anglicarewa.org.au/who-we-are/research#housing>
- ¹³ UNSW (2021) Australian experts views of housing in the economy. Accessed from: https://cityfutures.be.unsw.edu.au/documents/630/Expert_view_report_06.pdf
- ¹⁴ Infrastructure WA (2021) Foundations for a Stronger Tomorrow: State Infrastructure Strategy. July 2021 Accessed from: https://www.infrastructure.wa.gov.au/sites/default/files/2021-07/Foundations-for-a-Stronger-Tomorrow-Draft-for-public-comment-web-standard_2.pdf