

Social Housing

Invest in and manage social housing as essential infrastructure

Social housing is a critical part of the housing continuum that provides an important safety net for people on very low incomes who require a place to call home.

There is significant unmet demand for social housing in Western Australia. In 2022, there are over 19,000 households on the social housing waitlist¹. As of 2019, researchers calculated a shortage of 39,200 social housing dwellings across the state.

Due to years of underinvestment from all levels of government, social housing represents just 3.8% of WA's total housing stock², which is below the national average of 4.3% and is very low by international standards.³ This has led to extended wait times and a reduced safety net where social housing is only able to be allocated to those with very complex needs or an urgent need for a home.⁴

Shelter WA is calling for ongoing increased investment in social housing to ensure that a diverse range of social housing products are available, with homes close to public transport, services and amenity, to anyone who needs it.

Addressing the shortfall of social housing is a shared responsibility of Commonwealth and state governments.

To maximise investment, the Commonwealth government must develop a national housing strategy, with specific targets across the housing continuum, and a focus on housing people on low and very low incomes. **A national strategy should include a longer term target to increase social housing to 10% of total housing stock by 2036.**

We need a step change so that social housing is treated as essential infrastructure.⁵

This would involve:

- Demand modelling with investment commensurate to current and projected need.
- Adequate, rolling and permanent funding and financing mechanisms.
- Dedicated investment streams for new supply and asset management.
- Investment cycles that compliment broader economic trends.

In WA, social housing investment needs to be more closely aligned with evidence-based needs modelling. The current *WA Housing Strategy 2020-2030* is targeting only a 6% net increase in social homes this decade which is inadequate and should be revised to align with current and projected need.

In addition to increasing supply, the standards for social housing must be improved. WA's social housing assets are ageing and of deteriorating quality, with only 78% of public housing dwellings meeting the most basic standards for habitation in 2021.⁶ More proactive and robust asset management systems are urgently required to maintain new and existing dwellings. There is a need for improved liveable standards for social homes to meet modern expectations and reduce the cost of running the home.

¹ Extract from Hansard (11 August, 2022). Public housing – waitlist. From: [https://www.parliament.wa.gov.au/Hansard/hansard.nsf/0/550a312a32fdcb5a4825889f00264f19/\\$FILE/C41+S1+20220811+p3441a-3441a.pdf](https://www.parliament.wa.gov.au/Hansard/hansard.nsf/0/550a312a32fdcb5a4825889f00264f19/$FILE/C41+S1+20220811+p3441a-3441a.pdf)

² Infrastructure WA (2022) State Infrastructure Strategy: Foundations for a Stronger Tomorrow.

³ OECD (2020), "Social housing: A key part of past and future housing policy", Employment, Labour and Social Affairs Policy Briefs, OECD, Paris, <http://oe.cd/social-housing-2020>.

⁴ AHURI (2019) Understanding the 'residualisation' of social housing. Policy brief. <https://www.ahuri.edu.au/research/brief/understanding-residualisation-social-housing>

⁵ Lawson et al. (2019) Social housing as infrastructure: rationale, prioritisation and investment pathway, AHURI. <https://www.ahuri.edu.au/sites/default/files/migration/documents/Social-housing-as-infrastructure-rationale-prioritisation-and-investment-pathway-Executive-Summary.pdf>

⁶ Productivity Commission (2022) Report on Government Services. Part G: Housing and Homelessness. Table18A.36

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Along with appropriate homes, allocation and tenancy management policy must be reformed

to better respond to individual needs, minimise tenancy risk factors, and include exit planning to prevent evictions into homelessness. Policies should facilitate opportunity, and not entrench disadvantage, with clear housing pathways for tenants whose income increases during their tenancy

Shelter WA recommendations:

- That the Commonwealth Government develop a national housing and homelessness strategy with a goal of increasing social housing to 10% of all housing stock by 2036.
- That the WA State Government revise the social housing targets in the *WA Housing Strategy 2020-2030* to reflect current and projected evidence-based need over the next decade, including a range of supportive housing options to meet the diverse needs of the population. These targets should compliment Commonwealth Government policy and strategies.
- That the WA State Government develop and implement regional housing plans.⁷
- That the WA State Government establish permanent, adequate, rolling funding and financing mechanisms to deliver and maintain a pipeline of social housing in line with evidence-based need. These mechanisms should work proactively to leverage federal investment and facilitate growth of the community housing sector.⁸
- That the WA Government supports the community housing sector to develop and implement a community housing strategy for WA, with growth targets and strategies for achieving them. This would include a plan to transfer income-generating social housing assets to the community housing sector and optimise the sector as a key growth and delivery partner for social and affordable housing.
- That the WA State Government reform the social housing allocation process, including shifting from a waitlist approach to a housing needs register that prioritises applicants based on greatest need rather than length of wait.
- That the WA State Government introduce enhanced and transparent minimum standards for social housing, especially in relation to energy efficiency, thermal comfort and accessibility (universal design). At a minimum all new properties should meet Gold Standard accessibility standards.
- That the WA State Government introduce a transparent quality assurance framework for the management of social housing that includes: transparent performance metrics, a commitment to best practice asset management, embedding supportive landlord practices into tenancy management, reducing the ratio of housing officers to tenancies and ensuring that no one is evicted from social housing into homelessness.
- That the WA State Government develop pathway options for social housing tenants to take employment opportunities without jeopardising their housing security.⁹

⁷ As recommended by Infrastructure WA in the *State Infrastructure Strategy: Foundations for a Stronger Tomorrow*.

⁸ For example, a Housing Capital Aggregator and/ or a Housing Future Fund as recommended by the National Affordable Housing Alliance (NAHA) and the Grattan Institute, and a state Growth Fund (similar to the Victorian Government example).

⁹ Such as shared equity/purchase options or alternative tenures similar to Band B housing provided by the community housing sector).