



2020 ACT Election Issue Brief

Fixing Canberra's housing and homelessness crisis

For a just and fair Canberra, the next ACT Government must:

- **Commit to full delivery and proper oversight of the ACT Housing Strategy**
- **Achieve target of 15% of the Land Release Program for the supply of public, community and affordable homes**
- **Increase *effective* land transfers to ACT community housing providers and empower them to build more community and affordable housing**
- **Provide further investment in additional public housing and renewal of current stock**
- **Locate public and community housing in a range of locations including suburbs close to established amenities and services**
- **Commit to all new residential properties in the ACT built to meet Universal Design standards to make them able to be adapted and accessible to all people regardless of age, disability or other factors, and support reforms of the National Construction Code**
- **Re-establish and fund an advocacy voice for tenants in the ACT**
- **Develop an Indigenous Housing Strategy for the ACT including a pathway to a community controlled Aboriginal housing organisation**
- **Establish a specialist youth homelessness service**
- **Implement long-term housing solutions for detainees leaving the Alexander Maconochie Centre (AMC)**
- **Fund human rights compliant mental health specific supported housing.**

The issue

The ACT has a housing crisis. The [Anglicare Rental Affordability Snapshot](#) has consistently found almost no private rental properties are affordable for people on low incomes and income support.

The ACT Housing Strategy, first announced in 2018, promises to: create an equitable, diverse and sustainable supply of housing for the ACT community; reduce homelessness; strengthen social housing assistance; increase affordable rental housing; and increase affordable home ownership. **A new ACT Government must commit to delivering the strategy.**

It is important for the ACT community sector to have a full oversight of the Strategy's implementation and outcomes. Delivery of the ACT Housing Strategy has been slow, patchy and opaque. The primary governance mechanism for the implementation of the Strategy, the Minister's Affordable Housing Consultative Group, has not met since late 2018.

The target of 15% of government land releases for public, community and affordable housing, including infill development and new suburbs, requires **an increase in effective land transfers to ACT community housing providers and their empowerment to build more community and affordable housing**. We need reforms to land development, planning and zoning. ACTCOSS supports calls to waive the ACT's public housing debt under the Commonwealth-State Housing Agreement. ACTCOSS also supports the proposal by national housing advocacy groups for [Social Housing Acceleration and Renovation Program \(SHARP\)](#) that would deliver urgently needed jobs and provide an immediate boost in social housing.

The ACT Housing Strategy promises to deliver 260 new public houses through a \$161 million investment. While ACTCOSS welcomes this, **further investment in additional public housing and renewal of current stock** is required, as well as a commitment to **ensuring that social housing is built in a range of suburbs close to established amenities and services**. Canberrans living in social housing need to have equality of access to transport, schools, healthcare and other community facilities to prevent social isolation and disadvantage.

The ACT population is getting older and many people with disability face barriers to finding appropriate housing because of poor building design. The lack of adaptable and visitable housing results in social isolation and premature entry into nursing care for too many ageing Canberrans as well as people with a disability. ACTCOSS is calling for **all new residential properties in the ACT built to meet Universal Design standards to make them able to be adapted and accessible to all people regardless of age, disability or other factors, and support for reforms of the National Construction Code**.

The disproportionate impact on public and private tenants of the COVID-19 crisis, associated economic downturn and the lack of strong protections for tenants has highlighted the urgent need to **re-establish and fund an advocacy voice for tenants in the ACT**.

Aboriginal and / or Torres Strait Islander peoples in Canberra are disproportionately impacted by insecure housing, overcrowding and homelessness. In consultation with

Aboriginal and / or Torres Strait Islander people, the ACT should develop an Aboriginal-led **Indigenous Housing Strategy that includes discussions on a community controlled Aboriginal housing organisation.**

Growing numbers of young people in the ACT are experiencing homelessness and adult homelessness services are not appropriate places to support them. We need a **specialist youth homelessness service.**

Without secure housing and appropriate support, the ACT cannot achieve its recidivism goals. **We need a long-term housing solution for detainees leaving the AMC.**

We also call on a new government to fund human rights compliant mental health specific supported housing and provide support for people in both public and private housing who suffer from hoarding disorders.

The evidence

- The ACT has a shortfall of around 3,000 social housing dwellings, while almost 1,600 people in the ACT are homeless according to [data compiled by Everybody's Home](#).
- For every dollar invested, direct public investment in [social housing is estimated to boost GDP](#) by \$1.30.
- On average, applicants for [standard public housing in the ACT](#) are waiting 3.5 years (1,268 days) for a property (as at 3 August 2020).
- The [2020 Anglicare Rental Affordability Snapshot](#) found that out of 1,201 private rentals, none were affordable for a person on the Disability Support Pension, JobSeeker, Youth Allowance, or Parenting Payment Single without the coronavirus supplement.
- 42.7% of [low-income rental households are in rental stress](#) – that is, spending more than 30% of their gross household income on housing costs.
- Housing affordability is disproportionately impacting Aboriginal and / or Torres Strait Islander people, people experiencing domestic and family violence and people with mental illness.
- The [2010-2020 National Disability Strategy](#) committed to an agreed level of accessibility in all new housing by 2020 including [aspirational targets](#) under the National Housing Dialogue of 100% of new residential housing to meet the silver standard by 2020. With a few exceptions, the housing industry has not responded. The Australian Network on Universal Housing Design anticipated in its [2015 progress report](#) that less than 5% of the 2020 target will be met unless these features are regulated.
- A [Mission Australia survey](#) of young people found that in the ACT, one in 10 young people had couch surfed and 2.6% had lived without a fixed address, a refuge or transitional accommodation at some time.

Testimonials

“Although the ACT government has implemented a number of initiatives to address homelessness, long term solutions are urgently needed to address this housing crisis. A substantial investment needs to be made into increasing the number of social and public housing properties to meet the long waiting list and the increased demand that the economic impact of COVID-19 will have on many ACT households. Private rental is not an option for individuals and families on low incomes, and without housing options people will be left with choices such as rough sleeping, couch surfing or camping out. These options are not acceptable for any one and will only further disadvantage those who are already vulnerable”
– Nicole Wiggins, Early Morning Centre, 2020.

"...ACT Shelter supports the affordable and social housing election asks of the ACT Council of Social Service. We are particularly supportive of strengthening the target for affordable and social rental housing in greenfields, in-fill and urban renewal sites to 15% and using land release, planning and zoning levers to achieve it. Economic modelling shows when affordable and social housing is well located, every \$1 of public money invested generates \$6 - \$7 in economic activity elsewhere (Source: KPMG Evaluation Social Housing Initiative 2012). The ACTCOSS proposal would deliver a solid economic and social return on investment at a time when our construction industry, local economy and Canberrans on low - moderate incomes need it most. It's a win-win for Canberra..." – Travis Gilbert, CEO, ACT Shelter, 2020.