## To address the housing crisis, the ACT Government must:

* Enact a Right to Housing in the ACT in alignment with international Human Rights Frameworks.
* Fund and support an Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander community-controlled housing provider.
* Commit to full delivery and continuing oversight of the ACT Housing Strategy including funding for a fully independent, outcome and impact evaluation of the Strategy.
* Develop an additional action under the ACT Housing Strategy aimed at achieving minimum energy efficiency standards in all social housing and report annually on progress against this.
* Achieve a target of 15% of effective land transfers under the Land Release Program for the supply of public, community and affordable homes.
* Increase investment in the maintenance of the public housing stock and improve the handling of complaints from ACT Housing tenants.
* Strengthen the ACT Residential Tenancy Act to provide increased protections for renters and implement and enforce compliance measures to ensure changes to the Act are effective.
* Implement long-term housing solutions for detainees leaving the Alexander Maconochie Centre (AMC).
* Commit to all new residential properties in the ACT being built to meet Universal Design standards. The ACT should meet and exceed the new provisions to include Silver level for new housing in the National Construction Code.
* Re-establish and fund an advocacy voice for tenants in the ACT through establishing a rental ombudsman.
* Improve housing responses for LGBTIQA+ Canberrans including an LGBTIQA+ housing strategy and trauma informed LGBTIQA+ homelessness and housing support service, adoption of the LGBTIQ+ Inclusive Practice Guide for Housing and Homelessness Sectors in Australia (2020) and provide funding and support for ongoing LGBTIQA+ awareness training to mainstream housing and homelessness services.
* Fully fund a specialist youth homelessness service.
* Provide ongoing funding for in-house mental health and social supports within homelessness and community housing services.
* Enable and empower community housing providers (CHPs) through access to and release of affordable land, rezoning and rates exemptions, including:
  + allocating land to CHPs at discounted valuations to allow construction
  + allowing land value discounts for social purposes, and
  + government retention of a portion of equity of dwellings constructed to be reimbursed at time of future sale.
* Set a zero target for homelessness as everyone has the right to a home.
* Maintain complete funding for the Rent Remittance model for social housing providers.
* Fund a disability housing advisory and advocacy service. Fund provisions for specialist homelessness services including data collection capacity, and auditing accessibility of existing accommodation for people with disability.
* Ensure social housing is integrated with the community and accessible to essential services and transport.

## The Justification

* 1,777 people in the ACT were homeless according to the 2021 Census. The rate of homelessness in the ACT is projected to increase by 7.8% according to data compiled by Everybody’s Home.[[1]](#footnote-1)
* Anglicare’s latest Rental Affordability Snapshot shows that **no rental properties in the ACT** were affordable for single income households on Jobseeker, Youth Allowance, or other payments. Only one rental property (0.1%) was affordable for a couple with two children on minimum wage and only two rental listings (0.2%) were affordable for a single person on minimum wage. [[2]](#footnote-2)
* The 2023 Everybody’s Home report *Priced Out* finds that the ACT is unaffordable for essential workers to live in. On average, aged care workers, early childhood educators and nurses in single occupancy homes will need to spend between 70-78% of their income on rent.[[3]](#footnote-3)
* As at May 2023, there were 3,146 applicants on the social housing waiting list, with an average wait time of 1,869 days (more than five years) for standard housing.[[4]](#footnote-4)
* The 2023 Report on Government Services[[5]](#footnote-5) for housing and homelessness services shows that the ACT has:
  + the highest rate of persistent homelessness in the country, with **43%** of people accessing services experiencing homelessness for at least seven months
  + **47%** of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander homelessness services clients experiencing persistent homelessness
  + currently the lowest number of public housing dwellings in the ACT in 10 years
  + an average turnaround time for vacant stock in public housing that has almost doubled over the last year, from **50 days to 90 days**, and
  + the lowest rate of public housing dwellings that are appropriate for weather conditions and meeting energy efficiency expectations.
* 42.7% of [low-income rental households are in rental stress](https://www.abs.gov.au/ausstats/abs@.nsf/mf/4130.0) – that is, spending more than 30% of their gross household income on housing costs.
* 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.[[6]](#footnote-6)
* Lesbian and gay people are at least twice as likely as heterosexual people to stay in emergency accommodation or sleep rough. Bisexual people are at least three times more likely to experience a housing crisis or homelessness. Approximately a third of transgender and nonbinary people in Australia have experienced homelessness.[[7]](#footnote-7)
* There is a shortfall of 3,100 social housing properties*,* with 8,500 additional social housing dwellings needed by 2036 to meet the ACT’s current and projected need[[8]](#footnote-8)

## The Issues

* The ACT is experiencing a severe housing crisis. **The ACT Housing Strategy, first announced in 2018,** promises tocreate 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. We must deliver the Strategy and the commitments in the Agreement. **It is important that there is continuing full oversight** of the Strategy’s implementation and outcomes. Delivery of the ACT Housing Strategy has been slow, inconsistent and not transparent.
* The ACT Housing Strategy notes that to keep pace with changing community needs older homes need to be replaced with modern designs that focus on maximising energy efficiency. However, there is no related action and hence there is no reporting on energy efficiency outcomes under the Strategy. The ACT Government should **develop an additional action under the ACT Housing Strategy aimed at achieving minimum energy efficiency standards in all social housing and report annually on progress against this**.
* The ACT Housing Strategypromises 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**.
* 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 supports the proposal by national housing advocacy groups for [Social Housing Acceleration and Renovation Program (SHARP)](https://www.actcoss.org.au/sites/all/modules/civicrm/extern/url.php?u=2868&qid=46093) that would deliver urgently needed jobs and provide an immediate boost in social housing.
* Not-for-profit community organisations are the build-to-rent specialists. The ACT Government should use them to support an effective, sustainable, response to the housing crisis which includes community housing.
* The ACT population is ageing 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.
* 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**.A proposal to establish a rental ombudsman must be inclusive of private and public tenants and provide a legitimate avenue for dispute resolution as an alternative to ACAT.
* 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 establish and fund **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.
* LGBTIQA+ people in Australia experience homelessness and housing crises at higher rates than the general population.The ACT needs to fund research to scope the extent of the crisis in the ACT and respond accordingly. **An LGBTIQA+ Housing Strategy** should work towards a community controlled LGBTIQA+ homelessness and housing support service in the ACT and should fund ongoing awareness training for mainstream services and Community Services Directorate staff working in areas of housing and homelessness.
* 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.**

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| Delivering commitments in the ACT Parliamentary and Governing Agreement |
| While ACTCOSS was disappointed that housing did not feature more prominently in the agreement, the Government should nonetheless **fulfill its commitments under the** [**Parliamentary and Governing Agreement**](https://www.cmtedd.act.gov.au/__data/assets/pdf_file/0003/1654077/Parliamentary-Agreement-for-the-10th-Legislative-Assembly.pdf) for this term of Government as they relate to housing and homelessness – these include:  Working to improve social housing and housing affordability over the next four years as part of the roadmap for increased supply of affordable housing that is outlined in the ACT Housing Strategy, which includes:   1. Working with the land owners and community organisations to deliver the MyHome proposal in Curtin 2. Expanding the Early Morning Centre to a seven day per week service 3. Increasing emergency accommodation funding through OneLink 4. Expanding specialist homelessness service capacity ($18 million over four years) 5. Constructing a build-to rent affordable rental co-located with Common Ground Gungahlin and complete Common Ground Dickson 6. Providing additional funding for systemic advocacy in the housing sector, including restoring funding cuts created by the Federal Government for Shelter ACT 7. In close partnership with the community and the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Elected Body, supporting the establishment of an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander controlled community housing provider 8. Expanding further the existing land tax exemption program for affordable housing by increasing the cap to 250 and removing the time limit for this exemption. 9. Develop youth specific social housing services, such as the Government’s previously announced commitment to a youth foyer at CIT Woden 10. Working for the continued growth and renewal of social housing and increased affordable housing supply to meet housing need in the ACT. 11. Meeting its aim to deliver a total of 400 additional public housing dwellings by 2025, inclusive of the 260 additional dwellings already committed by the Government for the period 2019-2025. 12. Delivering its commitment to working towards an ambitious affordable rental housing target for dwellings focused on affordability for the second income quintile, with a goal of 600 additional dwellings by 2025-26.  * In addition the Agreement commits government to: * Amend building legislation to set a proportion of 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 * Acting on Building quality through establishing an expert team of publicly funded building certifiers within the ACT Public Service, setting up an Australia-first licensing scheme for property developers, including the creation of a “fit and proper person” test and rigorously enforced penalty scheme and introducing a registration scheme for engineers |

1. Everybody's Home, [*Homelessness and social housing need in your local community*](https://everybodyshome.com.au/heat-maps/), Everybody’s Home, 2022, accessed 15 March 2023. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Anglicare, [*Rental Affordability Snapshot: Regional reports \ fourteenth edition*](https://www.anglicare.asn.au/wp-content/uploads/2023/04/Rental-Affordability-Snapshot-Regional-Reports.pdf)*,* 27 April 2023, accessed 27 April 2023. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Everybody’s Home, [*Priced Out*](https://everybodyshome.com.au/wp-content/uploads/2023/04/EH-Priced-Out-Report-2023.pdf), Everybody’s Home, April 2023, accessed 5 May 2023. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. ACT Government, [Housing waitlist and processing times](https://www.communityservices.act.gov.au/housing/housing-options/waitlist-and-processing-times), accessed 31st May 2023. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. Productivity Commission, [*Report on Government Services 2023: G Housing and homelessness*](https://www.pc.gov.au/ongoing/report-on-government-services/2023/housing-and-homelessness), Australian Government, 24 January 2023, sector overview data tables, accessed 5 March 2023. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. Mission Australia, [*State Reports 2022: sub-report ACT*](https://www.missionaustralia.com.au/publications/youth-survey/state-reports-2022), Mission Australia, accessed 20 March 2023. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. Meridian, [*Meridian LGBTIQA+ Housing Position Paper*](https://www.meridianact.org.au/meridian_lgbtiqa_housing_position_paper), 2021, Meridian, accessed 20 Marc 2023. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. J Lawson, H Pawson, L Troy, R van den Nouwelant and C Hamilton, [*Social housing as infrastructure: an investment pathway*](https://www.ahuri.edu.au/research/final-reports/306), AHURI Final Report 306, Australian Housing and Urban Research Institute Limited, 2018, p. 63, accessed 22 June 2021. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)