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Senator Matthew Cannavan
Chair
Senate Reference Rural and Regional Affairs and Transport Committee
By email only: rrat.sen@aph.gov.au

Tuesday 9 May, 2023

Dear Chair and Committee Members

Thank you for providing an opportunity to respond to the Committee's inquiry into Australia's preparedness to host the Commonwealth, Olympic and Paralympic Games.

The Victorian Public Tenants Association (VPTA) is the voice of public housing in Victoria. We are the peak body representing people who live in public housing as well as those who are currently on the Victorian Housing Register (VHR) awaiting access to a safe, secure, affordable, long-term place to call home. During 2022, our team of Tenant Advocates provided free advice and assistance to more than 1,000 Victorians living in or waiting for access to social housing – a 75 per cent increase in demand from the year prior.

In addition to renter advice and assistance, community engagement, outreach and advocacy work, the VPTA is also a member of the Victorian Housing Peaks Alliance. The Alliance released a joint statement in 2022 calling on the Victorian Government to ensure the upcoming Commonwealth Games 'Leaves a Legacy for Good'. The document outlines six domains through which the Games can be used to protect and improve housing outcomes for Victorians before, during and after their conclusion.

The VPTA particularly seeks to draw the attention of the committee to the recommendation to ensure that at least 30 per cent of athlete housing be converted to social housing following the games, with at least 10 per cent to be Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander housing.

These figures should be read as an absolute minimum.

The VPTA would go further and argue that a significant majority of athlete housing must become specifically publicly owned and managed, public housing, which delivers greater equity of access, greater affordability, and greater security of tenure for renters.

As you read this letter, more than 100,000 individual Victorians are waiting for the dignity of a place to call home – in housing stock that simply does not yet exist. We cannot allow any opportunity to grow the availability of any kind of social housing, especially public housing, pass by.

Victorians are not alone in the struggle to attain and sustain affordable tenancies. Nationwide, everyday Australians are finding it harder than ever before to afford the basics, including secure housing. The VPTA submits that the principles outlined by the Victorian Housing Peaks Alliance should serve as a guide for all Australian Governments in the planning of global events.

The Victorian Housing Peaks Alliance document is provided as an addendum to this covering letter.

Yours sincerely

Katelyn Butterss
Chief Executive Officer
Victorian Public Tenants Association

Victorian Housing Peaks Alliance



Leave a legacy for good.

Hosting the Commonwealth Games isn't just about sport, it's about building our state.

We know the Games will be enjoyed by many. But we need to plan together now to anticipate and prevent unintended consequences.

Big sporting events can drive up rents, make housing less affordable and exacerbate homelessness.

As Victoria plans new and upgraded Games infrastructure, housing must be front of mind.

Victoria has time to get ahead of these challenges, and act so:

- The forecast influx of Games staff, teams and tourists doesn't displace regional Victorians from their homes and communities
- Existing short-term housing options for people in crisis (like caravan parks and motels) aren't taken over by Games workers and tourists.
- The 2026 Commonwealth Games leave a positive housing legacy that benefits the whole state.

Ahead of the 2022 Victorian election, we call on all parties to act so the Commonwealth Games:

Build on the nation-leading Big Housing Build to deliver both 'gold and silver' and 'bricks and mortar'.

This policy statement provides six measures to achieve this goal.

Victorian Housing Peaks Alliance

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BEVERIDGE
Tenants Victoria

TANIA FARHA
Safe + Equal

CHRIS
POVEY
justice connect

Build more social housing

Social Rentals Crisis Homelessness Housing First Experts

The Victorian Government has promised some of the 2026 Commonwealth Games athlete's villages will be converted into *affordable* housing when the Games end.

This is welcome.

However, this must be paired with a pledge to build more *public* and *community* housing (collectively referred to as *social* housing).

Victoria needs at least 60,000 new social housing properties by 2032.

The Victorian Housing Peaks Alliance calls for an election commitment to:

- **Make 30% social.** At least 30 per cent of all athletes' village accommodation should be converted into permanent social housing after the Games, to contribute towards the 2032 growth target.
- **House Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.** Ten per cent of this new housing should be managed by Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations. New styles of bigger homes suitable for large Aboriginal families should also be trialed.
- **Keep some affordable for community workers.** Reserve a proportion of the promised 'affordable housing' stock for key workers employed by local community services, so organisations can attract and retain the staff needed to deliver essential community support.
- **Build them right.** Ensure athletes' villages are built of sufficiently high quality, including high energy-efficiency standards and disability access, and meets community and neighbourhood expectations. This should be done in the contracting phase.



Protect regional renters

Social **Rentals** Crisis Homelessness Housing First Experts

Many low-income Victorian renters are already being forced out of their communities by a combination of high demand, low vacancy rates and skyrocketing rents. Aboriginal Victorians are significantly affected, also facing discrimination and exclusion in the market.

Major construction work building and upgrading Commonwealth Games venues will make matters worse, as well-paid contractors (and their families) relocate to regional areas.

The Victorian Housing Peaks Alliance calls for an election commitment to:

- **Regulate rent increases.** Develop a formula for fair rent increases as the Games approach. (Rents increased up to 400% during London Olympics and never returned to normal).
- **Stop a rush on homestays.** Develop strategies in partnership with councils and property investors so investors keep properties as traditional rentals, not temporary holiday accommodation.
- **Bolster local supports.** Resource local tenancy advocacy and community legal centres to inform renters about their rights regarding rent increases and evictions, and fund support services to quickly and effectively assist renters whose tenancies are at risk.
- **Target support for Aboriginal renters.** Extend funding for the Aboriginal Private Rental Assistance Program.



Shore up crisis accommodation

Social Rentals Crisis Homelessness Housing First Experts

Regional Victoria doesn't have a lot of dedicated crisis accommodation. This has led to an almost complete reliance on privately-owned hotels, motels and caravan parks.

During past Games events overseas, accommodation operators prioritised the needs of construction workers *before* the Games and tourists *during* the Games.

Major sporting events also create surges in family violence incidents and demand for crisis accommodation. Family violence is already the primary cause of homelessness for women and children, and this issue is likely to grow during the Games.

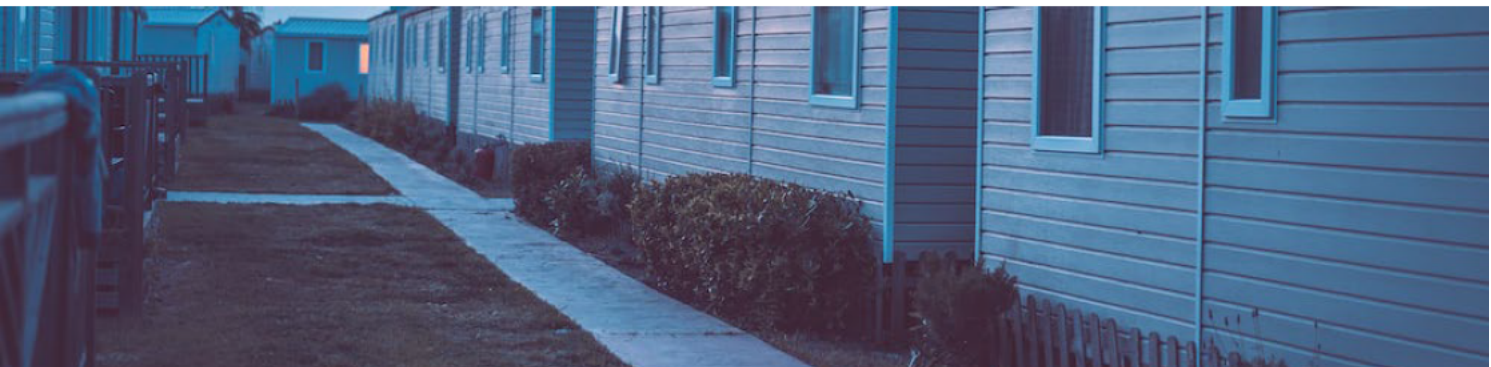
In Victoria, it's projected up to 500 local people will seek crisis accommodation in host site hotels and caravan parks during the Games, but be turned away.

The Victorian Housing Peaks Alliance calls for an election commitment to:

- **Boost crisis stock.** Provide at least 500 new social housing properties across the four host sites (Geelong, Bendigo, Ballarat and Gippsland).

These would be used in the crisis/transitional housing management program during the Games, and then made available as permanent social housing.

At least ten per cent of these properties should be made available to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people experiencing homelessness.



Fair and respectful responses to visible homelessness

Social Rentals Crisis Homelessness Housing First Experts

During major events, sections of the community often champion “move on” powers to relocate visible homelessness.

This is harmful and ineffective.

Forcing people away from the relative safety of populated areas and their support networks is dangerous, while issuing fines that will never be paid is nonsensical (and can even lead to expensive incarceration).

The Victorian Housing Peaks Alliance calls for an election commitment to:

- **Ban ‘move on’ approaches.** Proactively rule out ‘move on’ approaches to rough sleeping before and during the Commonwealth Games.
- **Protect people sleeping rough.** Implement new protocols for police and local law enforcement bodies to prevent the harassment of people sleeping rough, as occurred for the 2006 Melbourne Games. These protocols must incorporate guidance and accountability measures to ensure people with enforcement powers don’t breach the human rights of people without homes, and be guided by principles of cultural safety.



Embrace 'Housing First' approaches

Social Rentals Crisis Homelessness **Housing First** Experts

'Housing First' is a highly successful best-practice model of homelessness support.

Victoria currently operates a large program informed by the principles of Housing First operating across Victoria, including in the four host sites.

This program (called *From Homelessness to a Home*) supports 131 households around Geelong, 74 households around Ballarat, 85 households across Gippsland, and 106 people across the Loddon-Mallee (including Bendigo). Further packages support families with children.

However, funding for this program will expire in July 2023, putting at risk the substantial gains and housing stability achieved by this program's participants and placing many households at risk of returning to homelessness.

The Victorian Housing Peaks Alliance calls for an election commitment to:

- **Lock in *Homelessness to a Home***. Showcase Victoria as a world leader in ending long-term homelessness by making current funding for *From Homelessness to a Home* permanent.
- **Fully embrace Housing First**. Provide new funding for Housing First programs to end rough sleeping in Victoria, including the four regional host sites.



Put housing at the centre of planning and implementation

Social Rentals Crisis Homelessness Housing First Experts

KEY ENABLER

One lesson from the hosts of other major sporting events is that positive housing outcomes are not assured. They require careful planning and execution.

Stakeholders with policy expertise and lived experience of housing and homelessness must be included in Games delivery, legacy planning and implementation.

Such an approach will allow potential problems to be identified and resolved earlier, reducing the likelihood of avoidable, expensive and damaging consequences.

The Victorian Housing Peaks Alliance calls for an election commitment to:

- **Listen to experts.** Include housing expertise in the Commonwealth Games delivery and legacy planning committees.
- **Engage with communities.** Use existing data and proactively engage with local communities (including housing and homelessness providers) to ensure Games delivery and legacy strategies align with local aspiration and needs.
- **Evaluate properly.** Establish a monitoring and evaluation framework, with agreed housing objectives, outcomes and targets explicitly stated.

