

WHGNE Submission to the Senate  
Economics Legislation Committee



# Inquiry into the National Housing and Homelessness Plan Bill 2024 (No. 2)

Response from Women's Health Goulburn North East, August 2024

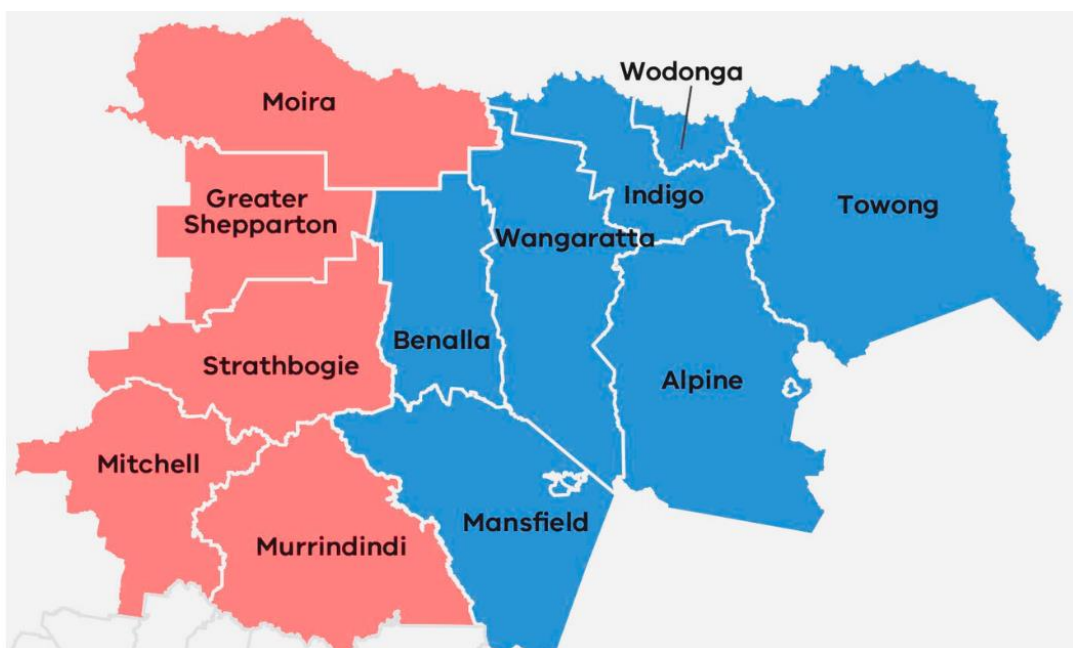
## Introduction

Women's Health Goulburn North East ([WHGNE](#)) is writing to express our strong support for the proposed National Housing and Homelessness Plan Bill 2024 introduced by Kylea Tink and David Pocock.

WHGNE is a proudly feminist Health Promotion organisation, leading change towards women's empowerment, women's health and wellbeing, the prevention of gender-based violence and ultimately, gender equality in the 12 local government areas that comprise our north-east Victoria and Goulburn Valley region. We work to support the creation of equal, just and resilient communities – one way we do this is via research and advocacy.

We believe that access to affordable, secure, climate-safe housing is an essential component to living a safe and healthy life for women and gender diverse people across our region.

## Our region



## Lived experience matters

Throughout September and October 2023, WHGNE asked members of our community - from Wodonga to Wallan, Barmah to Corryong - to tell us about their housing experiences, both the good and the bad, as well as inviting people to imagine how a better, more equitable housing system might look. Through listening to our community via surveys and in-person consultations in Wangaratta and Shepparton libraries, we collected evidence providing a regional and gendered perspective to the national housing crisis.

Through our consultation, we learnt that locals in our region are particularly concerned about:

- the cost-of-living crisis
- a lack of affordable housing
- a highly competitive private and public rental market

Locals expressed that these conditions are leading to:

- financial stress
- living in inappropriate or poor-quality housing
- housing insecurity, including the need to relocate from established communities and even homelessness

## Housing as a social determinant of health

Substandard and insecure housing is strongly associated with poor health and wellbeing, with climate change now serving to exacerbate housing issues and associated health outcomes. The relationship between housing and climate change is highly evident in rural and regional communities, as they are disproportionately affected by these extreme weather events (Climate Council, 2023).

Climate change also has gendered consequences on housing security. In times of disaster like bushfires or floods, rates of gender-based violence increase (Parkinson & Zara, 2013),

which can have a detrimental impact on women's housing, as it is the leading cause of homelessness in women (Homelessness Australia, 2024).

Gender also impacts people's experience of the housing system. Compared to men, women are more likely to rent on the private market, meaning they are disproportionately impacted by the disadvantages that renters face, like insecure tenure, poor housing conditions and financial stress (Tonkin et al., 2023).

It is imperative to note that due to structural discrimination, housing issues disproportionately affect marginalised groups, compounding health inequities across identities such as gender, race, ethnicity, Indigeneity, migrant/refugee, LGBTQIA+ status, and disability (The Lancet, 2024; Amnesty International, 2024).

## Our recommendations

Following our community consultation, WHGNE put together a report "Housing as a Human Right. A Gendered Examination of the Housing System: Advocacy for Systemic Change", which details the lived experience of our community, their ideas for "better" and our resultant recommendations for advocacy and systemic change. Two of our major recommendations aligned directly with the proposed bill.

### **1. Challenge the narrative of the Great Australian Dream of home ownership**

We need to reframe housing as a human right and a key social determinant of health, rather than a privilege reserved for the wealthy.

*The Great Australian Dream is becoming increasingly unattainable for many people. To meaningfully address the housing crisis, we need to disentangle the meaning of "home" from "homeownership" (Bate, 2018).*

In Australia today, renting is no longer purely a temporary step before buying a house, however, as described by our community and broader research, it continues to be insecure and unhealthy – with short term leases, in poor quality houses (Baker, 2023).

We need to broaden the definition of home, to ensure we are valuing different tenures equally and for this value to be reflected in policy efforts and investment decisions. A home's security, stability, quality and profitability should not be determined by whether you own it or rent it, privately or publicly (Sisson & Chatterjee, 2020).

**2. The formulation of a national housing plan that unifies the approach to housing nationwide, with clearly delineated responsibility and guidelines pertaining to all levels of government and relevant bodies.**

Addressing housing challenges demands holistic and cohesive solutions, yet responsibility for housing and homelessness policy is fragmented across different levels of government, with capabilities dispersed across diverse agencies with narrowly defined roles (Martin et al., 2023). This fragmentation is contrary to the complex and interdependent nature of the housing system and acts as a barrier to adequately addressing housing and homelessness issues (Martin et al., 2023). These factors indicate the need for the formulation of a national housing plan that unifies the approach to housing nationwide, with clearly delineated responsibility and guidelines pertaining to all levels of government and relevant bodies (Martin et al., 2023).

**3. The development of an intersectional equity audit for plans, significant land use actions, and local legislation to ensure all community members have equal access to input around decision making and consultation for equitable land use.**

As part of our report, WHGNE also recommended the development of an intersectional equity audit for plans, significant land use actions, and local legislation to ensure all community members have equal access to input around decision making and consultation for equitable land use. The proposed bill's National Housing Consumer Council, which would be made up of consumers of the housing system, including marginalised voices, like people with disabilities, First Nations people and youth, would support this inclusion of intersectional voices in housing policy. This aligns with our recommendation to ensure that



communities are provided with ongoing opportunities to participate in decision-making processes that impact them, which is a central tenet of a rights-based approach to housing (Government of Canada, n.d.).

## Concluding statement

We commend the government's commitment to developing a plan for addressing the housing crisis and urge that this commitment be established in legislation to make it stronger and more enduring. We believe that implementing this bill would represent a crucial step towards addressing the complexity of Australia's housing crisis through coordinated, long-term efforts to ensure that all Australians have access to safe, adequate, and affordable housing.

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