Response in support of the National Housing and Homelessness Plan Bill 2024

Associate Professor Karien Dekker, Dr. Iris Levin, Professor Jago Dodson

RMIT University

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Dear Senate Economics Legislation Committee,

Thank you for the opportunity to submit this submission to support the Bill for a National Housing and Homelessness Plan. We welcome the opportunity to provide feedback and comment on the Bill for its further improvement.

We are academics from the Centre for Urban Research and the Post Carbon Research Centre, RMIT University, working on diverse housing and urban issues. Associate Professor Karien Dekker's research focuses on designing inclusive housing communities. Dr Iris Levin's research focuses on social housing, social mix and the intersection between planning and housing. Professor Jago Dodson's research focuses on housing, transport, urban planning and urban policy. We have led housing research projects funded by the Australian Research Council (ARC) as well as the Australian Housing and Urban Research Institute (AHURI). We teach into the Urban Planning and Sustainability Program as well as the Property Program at RMIT. Professor Dodson was part of a recent research team examining an Australian housing and homeless strategy in an international context (Martin et al., 2023).

We welcome and support the Bill and its intent to "improve the governance and accountability of national housing policy" and establish "processes to develop, implement and maintain a National Housing and Homelessness Plan, aimed at facilitating a human-rights based approach to housing" (National Housing and Homelessness Plan Bill 2024 Explanatory Memorandum: 3).

We further support the three mechanisms proposed in the Bill:

1. Setting out requirements for a **National Housing and Homelessness Plan**, including a multi-level governance approach.
2. The installation of the **National Housing Consumer Council** (with recommendations below).
3. The installation of a National Housing and Homelessness Advocate and further strengthening of the position of **Housing Australia** as a key body.

General recommendations:

The **National Housing Consumer Council** is well placed to **co-design** sustainable housing solutions. Our international perspectives based on research in Europe and Australia informs us that co-design in governance is a key success factor in delivering affordable housing for cohesive communities at scale. The **collaborative design** of policies including consumers, landowners, developers and builders, as well as finance providers, is essential to achieve the intended outcomes of housing for all (Flanagan, Levin et al. 2020; Aminpour, Levin et al. 2023; Arthurson, Levin and Ziersch, 2015). Accordingly, we recommend that the Bill should make provision for:

1. The Consumer Council could be expanded to include older persons, and particularly women over the age of 55, who are among **the most vulnerable groups** in Australia and are at a high risk of homelessness (Kalemba et al. 2022).

Housing Australia is well placed to co-ordinate an integrated approach. Our international 30-year research experience shows that intersectional and **interdisciplinary approaches** (Human Rights-like) are best placed to solve 'wicked problems' that cannot be solved in a disciplinary manner only (Dekker and Van Kempen, 2004; Dekker, Lewis et al, forthcoming), leading to the **best outcomes** for low- and middle-income households (Dekker et al, 2011) in diverse communities (Dekker and Haw, 2024). Accordingly, we recommend that the Bill should make provision for:

2. Housing Australia should focus on co-ordinating a **multi-level, multi-scalar and multi-agency approach**.

Research capability and capacity

The complexity of the housing sector and the emerging policy environment are placing greater demand on governments to understand housing conditions and craft appropriate policy responses. The Housing and Homelessness Plan must support strengthening and prioritising of Australia's housing research capacity and capability. Currently housing is not a national research priority and is only mentioned once in the draft NRPs solely in relation to climate resilience. Accordingly, we recommend that the Bill should make provision for:

3. **Housing productivity, equity and sustainability** to be included as a dedicated priority within the national research priorities list.

In addition to positioning housing as a national research priority, there is an urgent need for better data and analysis that can be used to assess housing conditions. Accordingly, we recommend that the Bill should make provision for:

4. No-charge research access to housing market and administrative data, both at commonwealth and state level, including housing market data currently licensed to commercial providers.

5. Improved serving of housing data collected by commonwealth and state agencies free of charge to researchers, via national facilities such as the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, the Australian Urban Research Infrastructure Network, or via dedicated academic research platforms such as the RMIT Australian Urban

Observatory or the UNSW Housing Analytics Lab. To support this effort housing data and analytics should become a core focus of the National Collaborative Research Infrastructure Strategy (NCRIS).

In addition to improved data access, there is a need for greater investment in housing specific research capacity and capability among Australian research institutions and government policy organisations. Accordingly, we recommend that the Bill should make provision for:

6. Establishment of a five-year national PhD (20 annually) and Research Fellowship (20 annually) program to build housing and urban research capacity for Australian research institutions and supply capability to industry and government. A version of this model was proposed by the Australian Academy of Science Urban Systems Transformation Strategy (2024).
7. At least doubling of funding to the Australian Housing and Urban Research Institute National Housing Research Program and schemes additional research funding to the Sustainable Built Environments National Research Centre.

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on this Bill.

Sincerely yours,

Associate Professor Karien Dekker, Dr Iris Levin and Professor Jago Dodson.

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