

NORTHERN HOMELESSNESS NETWORK



Submission to the National Housing and Homelessness Plan Bill 2024 (No. 2)

Northern Homelessness Network Submission to the Senate Economics Legislation Committee Inquiry into National Housing and Homelessness Plan Bill 2024 (No. 2)

Date: 8th August 2024

Purpose: To support the National Housing and Homelessness Plan Bill 2024 (No. 2)

Overview: The National Housing and Homelessness Plan Bill 2024 (No. 2) is a significant legislative proposal addressing the persistent issues of housing affordability and homelessness in our country.

This bill calls for adequate housing to be treated as a human right for every Australian by mandating that the Federal Government make a long-term plan to transform Australia's dysfunctional housing system.

Position: The Northern Homelessness Network (NHN) is of the firm opinion that Australia needs a national housing and homelessness strategy that provides an authoritative framework for policy development, action, and accountability. The Road Home in 2008 was Australia's last national homelessness strategy and is now 15 years old. The lack of commitment to housing policy in Australia has led to the disastrous housing crisis in this country.

The NHN strongly supports the National Housing and Homelessness Plan Bill 2024 (No. 2) because it has the critical components to end homelessness including a national plan • to realise the right to housing • Building constituencies for systemic reform and • Legislation.

Reasons for Support:

1. Human rights focus

Benefit: The Bill makes it clear that the Commonwealth has the constitutional authority to pass the legislation. It recognises human rights as the basis for discussions with various housing policy stakeholders and as a guide for developing coordinated policies. Recognising housing as a human right in Federal legislation would start the process of much-needed change, providing the enablers for ending homelessness in Australia. We support that the Bill will not create specific housing rights that individuals can legally challenge.

2. Creates obligations on the Housing Minister

Benefit: The Housing Minister will have to develop a 10-year NHHP, collaborate and consider specific advice, provide progress reports (every 3 years), revise and establish a subsequent 10-year NHHP, and have a designated agency (Housing Australia) as the primary agency to evaluate the Plan. This approach will ensure that future Governments maintain their commitment to a

National Housing and Homelessness Plan. This is particularly pertinent now in the context of the long delays in the publication of a National Strategy, despite extensive inputs and submissions from housing and homelessness stakeholders in its development.

3. Establish a National Housing Consumer Council

Benefit: The inclusion of a Consumer Council advising the Housing Minister on the effectiveness of the National Housing and Homelessness Plan will lead to a more grounded and responsive system that meets the needs of those experiencing homelessness or in housing insecurity. We support the notion that the Consumer Council will not conduct investigations of individual's housing issues)experience.

Northern Homelessness Network

The NHN is a collective of 30 member agencies, managing approximately 100 homelessness programs across seven Local Government areas of Yarra, Darebin, Moreland, Hume, Nillumbik, Banyule and Whittlesea. The Network works collaboratively to improve responses to people experiencing homelessness in Melbourne's Northern region through:

- coordinated homelessness service system arrangements
- consumer consultation
- linkages with allied service sectors and shared professional development

The increasing rates of homelessness across Victoria are inextricably linked to the housing crisis with low-cost accommodation options disappearing. 4,938 people were counted as homeless in Melbourne's North in the 2021 Census ¹. That was up 9% in the region since 2016.

Almost one in three low-income households (29.9%) were in rental or mortgage stress in 2021 in the Northern region ². Any change in circumstance for example ill health, loss of employment or relationship breakdown can lead households in mortgage or rental stress to become homeless. Anglicare's Rental Affordability Snapshot 2024 ³ indicates that people on income support face extreme difficulties in accessing private rental accommodation in metropolitan Melbourne. Less than 0.1% of properties are affordable for single people over 21 years of age on the disability support pension. There are no affordable properties available for single parents with children on parenting payments, single people on job seeker payments or young people on youth allowance in metropolitan Melbourne. In the Northern region, 1.5% of 2-bedroom private rental properties were affordable for a couple with children on a Centrelink income in March 2024⁴.

Conclusion

The National Housing and Homelessness Plan Bill 2024 (No. 2) represents a forward-thinking and necessary response to the housing and homelessness crisis. Its well-rounded bill, combining the key elements required to transform Australia's dysfunctional housing system, The NHN commends the Independent Senator DAVIC Pocock and Member for North Sydney Kylea Tink for jointly introducing the Bill into the Senate and House of Representatives and urges all stakeholders to support it in its current form.

¹ [Social Statistics \(socialstats.com.au\)](https://socialstats.com.au)

² http://phidu.torrens.edu.au/current/data/sha-aust/lga/phidu_data_lga

³ 2023: Rental Affordability Snapshot - Anglicare Australia

⁴ <https://www.dffh.vic.gov.au/publications/rental-report>