

**Submission
No 17**

**OPTIONS TO IMPROVE ACCESS TO EXISTING AND ALTERNATE
ACCOMMODATION TO ADDRESS THE SOCIAL HOUSING SHORTAGE**

Organisation: Platform Youth Services

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Submission: Options to improve access to existing and alternate accommodation to address the social housing shortage

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Platform Youth Services is a Youth Specialist Homelessness Services that provides programs and services to young people between the ages of 12- 25 years old who are, homeless or at risk of homelessness.

Platform provides crisis accommodation to young people aged 16- 19 years and transitional accommodation for those ages 17- 24 years, to young people who are unlikely to be able to return to family options. In both programs Platform aims to assist young people to develop their skills and capacity to live independently.

Part of the services provided is assisting young people to proactively access the private rental market, once they have the skills, knowledge, and affordability. Historically, we have had success supporting young people to move from transitional supported accommodation to private rental options, in both shared and single tenancies.

But this has become increasingly difficult in the current rental market with many landlords reluctant to rent to young people, over a full-time working couple who have a rental history and who can also offer to pay more than the advertised market rent. The current rental prices for a small 2-bedroom unit have sky-rocketed to height, seeing many young people, including those with increased income, finding it difficult to access the market.

Many of the young people we are working with are in receipt of a government allowance and may have a casual job to supplement their income. The lack of access to the current housing market puts young people at even more risk of long-term homelessness and therefore options such as share accommodation are becoming more and more viable.

Share accommodation can be an excellent stepping-stone for young people, under the right conditions, but unfortunately, we have seen young people being taken advantage of by “landlords”. For example, where a property is set up to house many people in a small space and charging high rent, or providing inadequate and unsafe housing conditions, such as exposed wires throughout the house, no privacy from others. These situations are often private agreements, so young people are left with little opportunity to address these concerns without being evicted.

The current COVID pandemic, has also seen many young people we work with lose casual employment options, and whilst in 2020, they were able to access subsidies through Jobkeeper and the COVID supplement, these payments were reduced or finished. New financial support is available for those who have lost employment this year, but it is reduced, and access, eligibility and timeframes has been noted as concerns that is leaving people in our communities under financial stress.

In considering options to improve access to existing and alternate accommodation to address the social housing shortage whilst understanding the positive impacts that this could have on youth homelessness and other at-risk communities, this submission considers several potential opportunities that could support positive changes.

1. 'Meanwhile use' (temporary supported accommodation)

Given that the sector is aware that there is consistently vacant housing stock that could be otherwise utilised in more sustainable ways, there is potential to investigate “meanwhile” purpose, whilst Housing departments finalise the ongoing purpose for these properties.

For example, these properties could be offered to SHS service providers, to manage medium term agreements, to house homeless young people (or adults) as a further steppingstone to independent housing. A lease could be in place paying their share of the market rent. This would also see that the occupants can then access a rental history and ledger at the end of their stay that they can use when applying in the private rental market.

For SHS providers such as Platform we manage several larger properties with individual lease agreements for the residents (up to 4 in one property). Providing the case management support to ensure they are sustaining and maintaining the property and their individual residential agreements.

We also provide tenancy and general case management support to young people that we do not house in our own managed properties. Some of these young people we would like to house, but we do not have the current property or vacancies to do so. This would be an opportunity to house more young people and reduce their ongoing risk.

Larger scale properties such as bedsit units could also be purpose refitted to establish “Foyer” model projects for young people, where a service could maintain an office on site to oversee the resident support during the day, Monday to Friday, whilst offering wrap around support services with a focus on education and employment.

These types of programs also move away from standard homelessness services and focus on young people as students or consumers, instead of clients. There have been various studies regarding the impact of these types of programs that show how engagement in education and completing education goals increases opportunities for employment whilst reducing and if not breaking the potential cycle of homelessness for young people.

Platform have successfully implemented an education first model, that has seen positive outcomes with young completing their tertiary education and moving to private rental market.

2. Improve access to existing accommodation to provide community housing.

Platform currently supports young people to access rental subsidy products such as Rent Choice Youth, through Housing NSW, which supports young people to access the private rental market, as well providing subsidies for the duration of the program. This product and many like it were implemented to increase access housing pathways. However, whilst these products have proved positive in some aspect there are limitations due to the commitment from real estates and landlord being open to taking on products

Young people represent (54%) of people who are seeking help from Specialist Homelessness Services but are only 2.9% of those who are tenants within the social and public housing (AHURI, 2018). There should be incentives and initiatives offered to Social and Community Housing organisations for targets of increasing housing young people.

Studies have shown successfully housing young people earlier, with wrap around support services increases their capacity and independence, allowing them to be able to work on their trauma this trauma and or co- morbidity issues. They are then less likely to require this support later in life, which can also reduce the cost of homelessness in the long run.

There could also be options of incentives that real estates could be offered in partnering with social and community housing organisations that would increase their philanthropic interests, that support safer communities such as campaigns Everybody's Home.

3. Options for crisis, keyworker and other short-term accommodation models.

This would require funding to cover the costs of workers, but not out of scope with current programs and services already being provided. The barriers here would no doubt be that SHS services do not have the funding to support a project of this scale and therefore the government would be required to fund these types of projects.

Current funding structures would not be able to support this on top of already funded services however, with additional funding and agreement with funding bodies this could be considered to increase services. Again, access to meanwhile properties could assist with this type of model, but there would also be further costs to refurbish and fit out the property for such as purpose, and this would also require specific funding.

4. Barriers to additional supply across NSW, including for smaller non-CHP housing providers.

The lack of committed funding from government continues to be a barrier to ongoing social housing needs. Although in recent times there has been funding committed to Affordable housing, this only supports a very small cohort of clients leaving a large majority who are ineligible due to lower affordability.

Currently there is a shortfall of approximately 200,000 social and affordable properties in NSW right now and approximately 60,000 households on wait lists (NCOSS 2020). Therefore, it is imperative that the NSW Government work on appropriate funding plans to boost the much-needed gap in this area.

It is imperative that we consider all opportunities to address and improve access to existing and alternate accommodation. There are properties that are available, even in short term opportunities that for a mean time could help in addressing access whilst other more sustainable options are worked on as well as addressing the basic housing needs of our most vulnerable in the community.

References

1. Redesign of a homelessness service system for young people
2. <https://www.ahuri.edu.au/research/final-reports/327>
3. NSW Government Urged to back social and Affordable Housing Infrastructure
<https://www.ncoss.org.au/2020/04/nsw-government-urged-to-back-social-and-affordable-housing-infrastructure-boom-in-response-to-COVID-19/>