

**Submission
No 31**

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

Organisation: The Salvation Army Australia

Date Received: 13 August 2021



Legislative Assembly Committee on Community Services
Parliament of New South Wales

Via email: communityservices@parliament.nsw.gov.au

Inquiry into options to improve access to existing and alternate accommodation to address the social housing shortage

Dear Chair,

The Salvation Army welcomes the New South Wales Government's efforts to address the social housing shortage through its exploration of 'meanwhile use' (temporary supportive accommodation). It is our hope that the findings and recommendations of this inquiry will provide the information and guidance necessary to direct priority funding and policy initiatives and improve social housing outcomes for the people of New South Wales.

The Salvation Army is an international Christian movement with a strong presence throughout Australia, including extensive networks of corps (Salvation Army churches) and social programs (including housing, homelessness and family and domestic violence services) in New South Wales. Fundamental to the ethos of The Salvation Army is that every human being has inherent worth and every person should live with dignity.

We believe access to appropriate, affordable, and secure housing is fundamental to living with dignity, where having a home provides the foundation for any family or individual's engagement in work, education and social relations. It is also consistent with Article 25 of the United Nations Declaration of Human Rights.¹ The Salvation Army identifies the provision of social housing as an essential safety net in ensuring this right.

To support the New South Wales Government in its efforts to address the social housing shortage, this response presents policy and service delivery considerations identified through targeted consultations with our highly qualified and experienced staff from our key homelessness, youth, family and domestic violence and housing programs.

While addressing the themes arising from the terms of reference, our consultations consistently drew an overwhelming and overarching finding, which is that no amount of temporary, supportive accommodation can address the critical shortfall of appropriate, affordable, secure, and long-term housing. While supportive crisis and transitional housing, including meanwhile use housing, should

¹ See <https://www.un.org/en/about-us/universal-declaration-of-human-rights>.

continue to be afforded relative priority as part of efforts to end homelessness, it should be only part of a response that results in meeting the need for permanent affordable housing, namely social housing.

Understanding Meanwhile Use

In our deliberations around meanwhile use, it was evident that there were many, varied and sometimes conflicting understandings of what meanwhile use actually was. Even when broadly agreed as 'comprising any land or building that could be utilised (for a minimum of two years) for the purposes of temporary, supportive housing', there remained many questions of context and specificity around the unique attributes of any given property scenario.

There was clear support for projects such as Beecroft House or recently unoccupied hotels such as Sydney's Addison Hotel, where the nature of the pre-existing facility had clear parallels with the meanwhile use utility for which the property was re-purposed. These parallels include attributes such as pre-existing bedrooms, bathrooms and catering facilities, together with the likely positioning in locations with accessible transport, parking and community facilities. As such, it may be anticipated that any renovation, refitting and furnishing required would be readily achievable and costings transparent. By contrast, the refurbishment of other buildings that were not originally conceived for housing, such as warehouses, shops and office buildings, would require more specialised appraisal and budgeting on a case-by-case basis.

Fit-for-Purpose

Similar to the discussion exploring the scope and definition of meanwhile use, the issue of being fit-for-purpose raised more questions than it provided clear solutions. Among the considerations canvassed was the central question of cost. Our staff shared the view that while almost any property could be transformed from its original use for the purposes of meanwhile use transitional housing, there would need to be clear funding roles and responsibilities and economic modelling that informed project viability. Again, these factors and costs would be unique to the property in question and should include:

- Are there any one-off renovation costs? Who pays?
- What is the likely meanwhile use duration (two years, five years, twenty years, etc)? Knowing the minimum meanwhile use duration is essential to effective cost modelling.
- On-costs associated with providing support services and property maintenance? This may be dependent upon the individuals/cohort occupying the property and their quantum.

But being fit-for-purpose also assumes that the specifications for the properties' transformation into transitional housing have been agreed. In order to be better than a motel room, which is often the standard option available for crisis accommodation (and without the need for capital investment),

the following attributes were identified as minimum for transitional housing, where people may be expected to stay for periods ranging from three months to two years:

- Rooms/apartments should be self-contained and include private bathroom and cooking facilities.
- Sunlight and fresh air are essential.
- Minimum building/occupancy/quality standards must be adhered to.
- Rooms/apartments must be suitable for the family unit (whether single or couples with or without children).
- Accessibility standards must be appropriate if people with a disability or older people are to occupy (working lifts and universal design, etc).
- Provision for pets.
- Parking is available for residents, staff, and visitors.

Finally, being fit for purpose means that the client or cohort composition of any given meanwhile use property is appropriate and safe for the residents. This includes ensuring:

- Women and children escaping family and domestic violence are not expected to co-locate with perpetrators or others who are deemed to be a threat.
- Security screen doors/windows are provided for safety, while allowing interaction with the outside world.
- Young people are not inadvertently placed at-risk by exposure to inappropriate adults.
- Unnecessarily re-traumatising groups or individuals for whom a housing first (in permanent housing) is required. For example, most homeless older women require a permanent affordable housing solution rather than a transitional opportunity to get back on their feet.

Assessment and Support

Still within the theme of definitions, it is unclear whether the New South Wales Government's reference to supportive accommodation assumes the inclusion of appropriate case management support (or just financial support via a housing subsidy), and what is intended concerning the assessment of potential residents for placement. Based on our extensive service delivery experience in placing and supporting people in our crisis, transitional and long-term community housing properties, the following considerations around assessment and support were identified:

- Because meanwhile use properties will be retro-fitted and potentially form an increasing component of the homelessness service system (i.e. properties that were not intentionally built nor located as social service infrastructure), the careful assessment of clients for placement in each unique property will be required. This assessment needs to prioritise consideration of the clients' individual housing needs and prospects, case management support, social and community engagement needs and prospects, employment/study/recreation requirements, together with the appropriateness of the client composition of the specific property.
- As practised in our dedicated homelessness services and identified as a significant gap in the use of hotels during the states' response to COVID-19, the assessment for and provision of appropriate, tailored, trauma-informed support needs to be a key consideration for clients allocated to meanwhile use properties.
- Consistent case management and support needs to extend to individuals as they move on from meanwhile use housing to permanent, affordable housing.

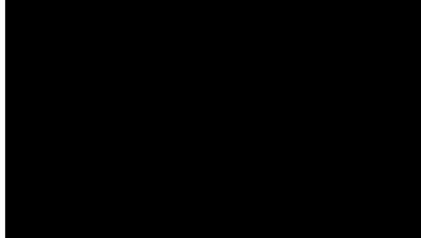
The Salvation Army remains supportive of the exploration of innovative approaches that seek to enhance short-term accommodation options while the New South Wales Government works with partners to address the critical social and affordable housing shortage in the state. While our experience already tells us that the current crisis and transitional homelessness system remains backed-up due to the lack of exit options into social and affordable housing, The Salvation Army is a willing partner in supporting new and creative solutions to ending homelessness.

We would also welcome future opportunities, in collaboration with other policy and service delivery organisations, to help develop and implement innovative solutions, by:

- Bringing the voice of people who have experienced homelessness.
- Representing the breadth of experience of homelessness cohorts.
- Testing ideas and identifying potential unintended consequences of proposed policy settings.
- Providing examples of best practice or innovative solutions that can be scaled.

Please contact me at [REDACTED] or on [REDACTED] if you would like to discuss any aspect of this response further.

Yours sincerely,



The Salvation Army Australia

13 August 2021

The Salvation Army acknowledges the Traditional Owners of the lands and waters throughout Australia. We pay our respect to Elders and acknowledge their continuing relationship to this land and the ongoing living cultures of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples across Australia.

We also acknowledge future aspirations of all First Nations peoples. Through respectful relationships we will work for the mutual flourishing of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians and non-Indigenous Australians.

We commit ourselves in prayer and practice to this land of Australia and its people, seeking reconciliation, unity and equity.

