

**Submission  
No 88**

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

**Organisation:** Muslim Women Australia

**Date Received:** 1 September 2021



Muslim Women Australia

State branches: NSW | VIC | NT | WA | ACT

Advocate | Research | Serve | Network | Lead

# MUSLIM WOMEN AUSTRALIA SUBMISSION

## COMMITTEE ON COMMUNITY SERVICES

INQUIRY INTO OPTIONS TO IMPROVE ACCESS TO  
EXISTING AND ALTERNATE ACCOMMODATION IN  
ORDER TO HELP ADDRESS THE SOCIAL HOUSING  
SHORTAGE IN NSW

September 2021

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1 September 2021

The Chair  
Committee on Community Services  
Parliament House  
Macquarie Street  
SYDNEY NSW 2000

Dear Ms Wendy Lindsay MP,

### **Parliamentary Inquiry into Social Housing - Muslim Women Australia**

Muslim Women Australia (MWA) is pleased to contribute to the NSW Committee on Community Services' inquiry into options to improve access to existing and alternate accommodation to address the social housing shortage.

MWA is well placed to advise the Committee on this issue having supported culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) communities and Muslim women experiencing domestic violence and homelessness, for over 35 years with case management support, including access to emergency and community housing.

As a registered Community Housing Provider (Tier 3 CHP) and as the leading Multicultural Specialist Homelessness Service (SHS) in NSW via the Linking Hearts Multicultural Family Violence and Homelessness Service (Linking Hearts), MWA delivers support to multicultural communities across Greater Sydney, primarily in the South-West Sydney and Sydney districts.

Social and affordable housing is inextricably linked to DFV and homelessness support and is essential to effective, quality, dignified outcomes. As a specialist provider of domestic and family violence (DFV) services to multicultural communities, MWAs' Linking Hearts focuses on prevention and early intervention, safe and supported crisis and transitional accommodation, rapid rehousing and intensive support for clients with complex needs as well as supporting women in their own choice of home. MWA's support of CALD women experiencing DFV includes extensive culturally appropriate, client centred, trauma informed support for women and children in a manner which prioritises safety and facilitates access to housing, legal, migration, financial, employment, educational and spiritual services.

MWA has demonstrated experience in managing social housing properties and tenancies through its Linking Hearts service. MWA currently administers a housing stock of 41 homes including both crisis and transitional accommodation. As part of its commitment to best practice, a no wrong door approach and responsive homelessness interventions, MWA over the last 35 years has worked hard to foster strong existing partnerships with State and Local governments and non-government agencies, including other housing providers such as Evolve Housing, MA Housing, Amelie Housing and Metro Housing.

MWA encourages the Committee to strengthen pathways to access ‘meanwhile use’ and prioritise support to multicultural women escaping family violence and experiencing homelessness to access crisis and short to medium term accommodation.

MWA encourages the Committee to centre the needs of CALD communities, with a greater recognition of their intersecting needs with respect to housing demand and supply issues across the Greater Sydney region.<sup>1</sup>

MWA also encourages the Committee to keep in view Tier 3 CHPs and SHS to support them in accessing and implementing ‘meanwhile use’ within flexible planning processes, with prioritized resourcing to scale existing integrated place-based Housing First models.

In doing so better outcomes will be achieved to support multicultural communities in line with NSW Government priorities as stated in the Future Directions for Social Housing Policy, the NSW Housing Strategy 2021-2041, the NSW Homelessness Strategy 2018 – 2023, as well as the NSW Premiers priority to break the cycle of disadvantage.

## Meanwhile Use

The NSW Housing Strategy proposes temporary supportive accommodation, which is the use of a vacant or underused building to provide temporary residential accommodation. Given the increasing challenge of housing demand, supply and affordability in Greater Sydney which is being further exacerbated by the economic and health impacts of COVID19 there is an urgent need for innovative mechanisms to support vulnerable individuals and communities.

MWA strongly supports and encourages strengthening pathways to access ‘meanwhile use’ as it will facilitate increased access for crisis and medium-term housing supports. Meanwhile use accommodation will complement broader social and affordable housing frameworks which work to address permanent housing and critical mass solutions.

*Meanwhile use will add value by:*

- Improving access to existing accommodation which can support immediate to medium term outcomes to support individuals and families at risk of homelessness by either repurposing vacant dwellings or improving case management support of tenants in ‘meanwhile use’ accommodation.

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<sup>1</sup> Canterbury Bankstown City Council, 2018 Housing Strategy Summary Report, pg. 4, 12 and 13  
The Greater Sydney Commission has set an aspirational target for Canterbury Bankstown LGA to deliver 58,500 dwelling by 2036, in order to meet the housing challenges faced. Canterbury-Bankstown is the most populous local government area within Greater Sydney, with an estimated population of 381,212. Canterbury Bankstown has experienced a population growth of +45,850 over the past 10 years.

- Support Tier 3 CHP and SHS scale up and increase service capacity of integrated place based HousingFirst models within a framework which mitigates organisational financial risk.<sup>2</sup>
- Create supply channels in metropolitan areas across Greater Sydney, which have significant supply challenges alongside diverse household groupings and dwelling needs, ageing populations and specialist tenant needs who often need to remain connected to work places and social communities.
- Providing interim usage of supported temporary accommodation (i.e. for refurbished existing accommodation) while larger development approvals and planning processes take place.
- Create innovative opportunities to support vulnerable persons access accommodation while Affordable Housing Contributions Schemes became practicable and viable in high density metropolitan regions.

*To support the accessibility, implementation and efficacy of ‘meanwhile use’, MWA recommends the following:*

- Capital funding allocated by NSW Government to support ‘meanwhile use’ accommodation via repurposing initiatives, focused on Tier 3 Community Housing Providers; as well as on partnership models local governments and Tier 3 Community Housing providers and SHS services operating in their LGAs.
- Meanwhile use accommodation should not require planning or development approvals in instances where accommodations settings will be used for similar purposes. I.e. a house is used for crisis support or transitional accommodation.
- For larger initiatives such as a community centre being repurposed into share-housing or core and cluster models, fast-tracked processes should provide approvals within 4 months. To support this local governments should assign a dedicated assessment officer to support ‘meanwhile use’ applications. These measures are required to ensure meanwhile use is ‘fit for purpose’ and will provide working parameters to support SHS and CHPs mitigate impact on resources.

### **Example 1**

Recently, MWA was successful in receiving infrastructure grant funding from Women NSW to repurpose an existing accommodation in Revesby from transitional housing to supported crisis accommodation with increased support capacity and office space. Fast tracked or removed planning process under ‘meanwhile use’ will ensure faster access to much needed services.

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<sup>2</sup> MWA proposed targeted support and resourcing of Tier 3 Community Housing providers and Specialist Homelessness Services as they meet regulatory and compliance requirements and are accredited according to the Australian Service Excellence Standard. This is preferred to smaller non-CHP organizations to ensure effective outcomes for tenant groups.

## **Co-Contributor Investment/Equity Models within a Social Responsibility Framework**

As part of 'meanwhile use' options as well as longer term solutions to address the social and housing shortages, MWA proposes increased capacity to fund co-contributor investment models. This will support identification of privately owned land which can be utilized for social and affordable housing stock for organizations' which operate within a social responsibility framework. This should be identified for existing providers with demonstrated housing, DFV and homelessness experience as a value add.

### **Example 2**

MWA submitted an unsuccessful tender for the Community Housing Innovation Fund proposing to provide access to privately owned land, to the value of over \$3million, for the purpose of developing social and affordable housing. Proposed was a 50/50 contribution where MWA would provide 100% land value with State government providing 100% building costs. This would have resulted in making available three privately owned sites (located in Canterbury-Bankstown LGA, side by side) to develop duplexes and studios as a single site accommodating over 30 beds, which MWA would have added to its existing social housing stock as part of its' case management support model.

### **Recommendations:**

1. State government should develop a strategy to coordinate and strengthen pathways to access 'meanwhile use' accommodation.
2. Fund and resource co-share partnership models between state and local governments, Tier 3 community housing providers and specialist homelessness services to provide integrated place based HousingFirst models of 'meanwhile use' accommodation.
3. Identify and map LAHC owned land and local government owned land which could be diverted to social and affordable housing including for 'meanwhile use'
4. State and local governments facilitate access to 'meanwhile use' accommodation via removing planning processes or fast-tracking approvals within a 4 month period.
5. Engagement across State Government and sector peaks to build capacity of Tier 3 Community Housing providers and homelessness services. A scoping exercise to identify opportunities for existing providers to expand their housing stock for short-term 'meanwhile use' accommodation; as well as to identify opportunities for longer term co-contributor investment/equity models, as identified in example 4, should be included.

## Specialised Tenant Groups:

MWA encourages the Committee to recognize the significant role 'meanwhile use' accommodation, if thoughtfully enacted, could yield for specialized group such as multicultural women escaping violence.

As both a Specialist Homelessness Service and Community Housing provider, MWA has extensive experience in providing culturally safe, supported housing and family violence service models for multicultural communities with recognition of their intersecting needs.

The gendered impact and intersection of family violence, housing and homelessness is well documented:

- Domestic and family violence is the leading cause for homelessness amongst women and children<sup>3</sup>. 50% of women who leave violent partner report that they're the ones to leave the home.<sup>4</sup>
- Limited and complex housing pathways place victim-survivors in a situation of great housing uncertainty, often leading to delaying leaving a perpetrator. "Equity Economics estimates that the lack of long-term social housing is leading to 7,690 women a year returning to violent partners and 9,120 women a year becoming homeless."<sup>5</sup>
- Safe at home measures such as start safely often require women to take on a financial burden, with no or minimal income, require the need to pay bond, or with minimal rental history
- Older women are the fastest growing cohort of homeless people, with a 31% increase between 2011 and 2016.<sup>6</sup>

Supporting specialized tenant groups such as women, should centre on safety and affordability. In light of the COVID19 pandemic, housing is now seen as critical infrastructure like no other time before, for those lucky enough to have one and the need for specialization heightened.

The need for specialized housing models and specialist service provision for CALD women inclusive of CALD older women and survivors of elderly abuse are even more vital now.

'Meanwhile use' accommodation will be essential to facilitating increase access to crisis and medium-term housing for women escaping violence. 'Meanwhile use' accommodation, if geared towards smaller scale community housing providers and SHS services such as MWA

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<sup>3</sup> Equity Economics, 2021, 'No Where to Go' – The benefits if providing long-term social housing to women that have experienced domestic and family violence

<sup>4</sup> Barrett Meyering, I., & Edwards, R. (2012). Safe at Home Programs (Fast Facts No. 8). Sydney: Australian Domestic & Family Violence Clearinghouse.

<sup>5</sup> Equity Economics, 2021 'No Where to Go' The benefits if providing long-term social housing to women that have experienced domestic and family violence

<sup>6</sup> Australian Human Rights Commission, 2019, Older Womens Risk of Homelessness Background Paper



Linking Hearts, can have significantly positive outcomes for victim-survivors and assist in breaking down structural barriers to access.

Integrated place-based HousingFirst models such as ours at MWA Linking Hearts work in a client-centred, trauma informed model which prioritises dignity and fosters effective outcomes for clients focusing on agency, workforce participation and maintaining community, social and diaspora connections. Housing is crucial to this, particularly for women from migrant and refugee backgrounds who reside and work across the South-West Sydney region in Greater Sydney.

Linking Hearts in supporting multicultural communities supports tenancy mix inclusive of single-parent families; women with children; larger household groupings; families on income support or low -income earners facing significant housing stress; as well as non-citizens (women on temporary visas experiencing violence) and newly arrived refugee and migrant communities.

For multicultural communities specialized tenant needs extends to safe and affordable housing and intersects with communication barriers, migration status, cultural diversity and extended family caring structures. Additionally, facilitating meanwhile use accommodation in core and cluster models or Housing First models which support multicultural older women alongside families with children, has proven benefits to improving their psycho-social wellbeing and fostering a sense of community and social cohesion.

### **Recommended Actions:**

1. Centre the needs of specialized tenant groups such as women, particularly multicultural women escaping violence in addressing housing shortages in NSW
2. Prioritise, fund and resource Tier 3 Community Housing Providers and Specialist Homelessness Services to access 'meanwhile use' accommodation to scale integrated place-based models, such as Linking Hearts, to improve outcomes for multicultural women and children escaping violence and homelessness.
3. State government should commit further funding to the Community Housing Innovation Fund and revisit tenders for further investment meanwhile use accommodation and equity based projects targeted towards specialized tenant groups such as CALD women experiencing homelessness and family violence.
4. Recognise the role of, and investment in, social and affordable housing options (including meanwhile use accommodation) as social scaffolding which fosters social capital and community resilience.



## Conclusion

As we continue to navigate the COVID19 pandemic in NSW, the need for safe, affordable and secure housing has never been so confronting. The 'Together Home' program has shown that with significant and responsive investment, homelessness and housing challenges can be effectively addressed. Rough sleeping however is only one form of homelessness. The COVID19 pandemic has also highlighted the challenges of over-crowding and couch surfing, which are more covert forms of homelessness that are often gendered.

Investment in 'meanwhile use accommodation' in a manner which allows it to be fit for purpose, will support access to crisis and medium term social and affordable housing options. Innovative pathways are required now as we continue towards larger scale permanent solutions to address the housing shortage.

The efficacy of this critical infrastructure should not just be viewed in terms of volume, bricks and mortar. Rather it acts as essential social scaffolding, which fosters social capital and community resilience.

*If you have any enquiries, please do not hesitate to contact Muslim Women Australia on*

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With Peace,

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