

REPORT ON PROCEEDINGS BEFORE

**LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY COMMITTEE ON
COMMUNITY SERVICES**

**INQUIRY INTO IMPROVING ACCESS TO EXISTING AND
ALTERNATE ACCOMMODATION TO ADDRESS THE SOCIAL
HOUSING SHORTAGE**

Virtual hearing via videoconference on Monday 8 November 2021.

The Committee met at 10:00

PRESENT

Ms Wendy Lindsay
(Chair)

Legislative Assembly

Mr Dugald Saunders (Deputy Chair)
Mr Justin Clancy
Ms Trish Doyle
Ms Melanie Gibbons
Mr David Harris
Ms Jenny Leong

The CHAIR: Okay. Please start the broadcast. Good morning, everybody, and before we start I would like to acknowledge the Gadigal people who are Traditional Custodians of this land. I pay my respects to Elders of the Eora Nation, past, present and emerging, and extend that respect to other Aboriginal and Torres Strait Island people who are present or watching online.

This is the second public hearing for the Community Services Committee inquiry into improving access to existing and alternate accommodation to address the social housing shortage. I am Wendy Lindsay, the Committee's Chair, the state member for East Hills, and with me today are fellow committee members. To my right, Mr Dugald Saunders, the Deputy Chair and member for Dubbo, and to my left Mr David Harris, the member for Wyong. Online via WebEx is Ms Trish Doyle, the member for Blue Mountains, Mr Justin Clancy, the member for Albury, Melanie Gibbons, member for Holsworthy, and Jenny Leong, member for Newtown. They are taking part via videoconference.

All witnesses will take part via videoconference and the hearing is being broadcast on the Parliament's website from the beautiful Jubilee Room.

To assist with the preparation of the transcript, I ask all members and witnesses to identify themselves when they begin speaking, and I thank everyone who is appearing before the Committee today. We will now begin with our first witness, Brad McIver.

BRAD McIVER, State Social Mission and Community Engagement Coordinator, State Manager for Homelessness NSW/ACT, Salvation Army Australia, affirmed and examined before the Committee via videoconference

BRIAN MURNANE, CEO, Amelie Housing, affirmed and examined before the Committee via videoconference

The CHAIR: Okay. Brad, would you like to make an opening statement at all before we begin with questions, today?

Capt McIVER: I would yes. Salvation Army. Firstly, let me acknowledge the Eora Nation as Traditional Custodians of the place on whose land and [inaudible] and pay past, present.

[Discussion recommenced following technical issues]

Capt McIVER: Thank you, Madam Chairperson. Brad McIver from The Salvation Army. The Salvation Army would like to take the opportunity of recognising the Traditional Owners of the land on which the Committee meets today, the Gadigal people of the Eora nation and pay our respects to Elders past, present and emerging. The Salvation Army has been living and working in Australia now for over 130 years and is one of Australia's longest serving Christian charity movements in the country. The Salvation Army continues to serve those experiencing hardship and injustice throughout the country. With an average operating budget of over \$1 billion, much of that work is in the areas of housing and homelessness.

Our vision is this: that wherever there is hardship or injustice, Salvos will live, love and fight alongside others to transform Australia one life at a time with the love of Jesus. It is due to our deep and longstanding experience in providing housing and homelessness services that the Salvation Army has provided its submission to this inquiry. We encourage the New South Wales Government to consider the further development of meanwhile use initiatives with consideration of the issues we have raised. But firstly, I would like to describe the meanwhile use project that the Salvation Army took recently in our response to the crisis for people experiencing homelessness during COVID-19 in 2021.

While this initiative was not profiled in our submission, it serves as a good practice case study that addresses some of the themes and issues outlined in our submission. Owned by The Salvation Army since 1900, Stanmore House is a historic property built in 1872 in the Sydney suburb of Stanmore. Already transformed into a conference centre, with seven self-contained units and 11 motel-style, ensuite rooms, the site was not able to operate as intended due to travel and other restrictions arising from the national and state lockdowns. With a need to relocate 25 people from our inner-city crisis homelessness because we could not maintain congregate care safely and in order to ensure social distancing and other public health measures during COVID-19, the facilities at Stanmore House required minimal adjustment in order to act as a safe and appropriate short-term alternative to either motel facilities or other refuge settings.

Apart from ticking all of the boxes with regard to appropriateness, a critical element in its success has been for each of the residents that spent time with us at Stanmore House, they were able to achieve appropriate, affordable, long-term housing as part of the exit strategy. This excellent outcome was achieved for service delivery, not to mention the individuals concerned, but also made possible by cross-sector collaboration with government from the beginning to the end. That is, we took the journey together across sector and with government. Similarly, opportunities exist elsewhere in The Salvation Army's property portfolio and that of other NGOs and government at all levels, such as that we have been exploring more recently at Marrickville with

Housing All Australians, with whom The Salvation Army have a national MOU.

Returning to the key points outlined in our submission, we believe that consideration of meanwhile use land and infrastructure opportunities should ensure that every dollar invested in a meanwhile use opportunity is the best value for that dollar in its contribution to addressing homelessness and affordable housing. Locations should and would require accessible transport, parking and community facilities. Rooms, apartments, should be self-contained and include private bathroom and cooking facilities as a key driver to people maintaining their dignity and for us showing the value and respect that all individuals deserve. Sunlight and fresh air are essential. Minimum building occupancy quality standards must be adhered to. Rooms or 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 those dwellings, that is, working lifts and universal design concepts taken into consideration. And of course, as we know, the presence of pets and the provision in accommodation for pets plays a major part in people's ongoing health and wellbeing.

The Salvation Army remains supportive of exploring innovative approaches that enhance short-term accommodation options while the New South Wales Government works with partners to address the critical shortage of social and affordable housing in the state. While our experience already tells us that the current crisis in the 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 the ending of homelessness. On behalf of Salvation Army, I would like to thank the Committee again for its time today and welcome your questions concerning the evidence we have submitted to inform the advancement of meanwhile use in New South Wales. Thank you.

The CHAIR: Thank you, Brad. Brian, would you like to also give an opening statement before we begin with questions from the Committee?

Mr MURNANE: Sure, yes, I too would also like to acknowledge the Traditional Owners, the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, the traditional custodians on the land where we are today and I acknowledge with great respect the Elders past and present. My name is Brian Murnane and I am the CEO of Amelie Housing. Amelie Housing is a community housing provider of the St Vincent de Paul Society. We own and manage 1042 social and affordable housing homes across New South Wales and of these, 384 are transitional housing properties. Our portfolio also includes 502 properties that were delivered through the New South Wales Government's Social and Affordable Housing Fund, commonly known as the SAHF program. We developed and tenanted these properties in three years and nine months from the time of signing a contract with the Government and we came in under budget.

I understand that this inquiry is seeking options to improve access to existing and alternative accommodation to address the social housing shortage. It would be remiss of me not to respond by advising that the best approach to address this social housing shortage is actually invest in more social housing. We acknowledge and welcome the existing commitments from the New South Wales Government, including the SAFH and Communities Plus programs. We equally note that the funding allocated in the recent budget to [inaudible] additional housing and fast-track some other development. But I am obliged to share that the existing commitments are not nearly enough to meet the community's needs.

Recent research of City Futures, a research centre, informed that the Social and Affordable Housing Fund phases one and two and the Communities Plus program and more recent announcements will deliver in the vicinity of 10,000 new social housing properties. But as of June last year, there were more than 50,000 applicants on the public housing waiting list. That equated to more than 110,000 adults and children waiting for a safe, secure, affordable place to call home. Vinnies New South Wales and Amelie Housing would like to see the New South Wales Government fund additional social housing across New South Wales. [Inaudible] seek additional [inaudible] social housing dwellings each year for the next 10 years.

If you hear the term social housing and that conjures up images of vast and sprawling public housing estates, I urge you to put this out of your mind. This was very much the old model of social housing and we do not practice or preach that anymore. The new model that we support is for much smaller developments of sites that are integrated into local communities where tenants have access to wraparound support services or tailored support coordination. If you have not seen a development like this firsthand, I would invite you to visit one or other of our newest communities. We have new social and affordable housing developments in most of our electorates, including Dubbo, Albury, Katoomba, Merrylands, Cardiff and Lilyfield, just to name a few. If that is of interest, please let me know and I am happy to arrange a visit for you.

Beyond social housing, we understand that the community—the Committee is considering the viability of meanwhile housing. As you will have read in our submission, Vinnies New South Wales and Amelie Housing acknowledge that meanwhile use housing has the potential to reduce homelessness in the short term and prepare new tenants for more permanent housing thereafter. It is our view that the Government may like to consider delivering meanwhile use housing on communities or the Plus sites or large public housing estates that are being

redeveloped. In fact I have [inaudible] experience of doing this in the redevelopment of Minto and the Airs Bradbury estate back in the early 2000s.

By accessing what other New South Wales Government land might be appropriate and by continuing the COVID-19-inspired solution of temporarily housing people who are experiencing homelessness in hotels and motels across the city. When considering the delivery of meanwhile use housing, we would urge the government to consider whether investment in social housing itself would be more beneficial. When New South Wales does see fit to proceed with meanwhile use housing, we would strongly urge government to seek to overcome some of the obvious challenges in its delivery. This includes ensuring that there is adequate funding for the refurbishment and maintenance of the dwellings themselves, ensuring that the dwellings are built to an appropriate standard. For example, they need to be accessible for tenants with mobility issues and safe for tenants who are escaping domestic violence.

We also contend that meanwhile use housing must include funding for wraparound support or tailored support coordination, to adequately support tenants with high and complex needs, and that people on the social housing waiting list should not be forced to accept an offer for meanwhile use housing that is far from their community, far from friends and family and the community and health services and other support networks. Acknowledging meanwhile use housing is temporary by nature, I would add that we would like to see enough permanent housing so that everyone who exits meanwhile use housing has a long-term place to call home, which conveniently brings me back to a full circle, for the need for government to invest in more social housing.

Were government to announce appropriately large-scale investment in social housing, it would go a long way to ensure that people that Vinnies works with every day, people experiencing significant disadvantage, people who are experiencing significant trauma and upset in their lives, would have access to appropriate, affordable, safe and secure housing. Thanks to the Committee for the opportunity to speak to you today and I am happy to answer any of your questions.

The CHAIR: Okay, thank you. Okay, well look, we will open it up to the Committee for questions now. So we do have members coming in via Webex and also members in the room here. So would anyone like to ask the first question? Justin.

Mr CLANCY: Thanks Chair. Brian and Brad, firstly, thank you for the good work that you and your agencies do, your organisations do. My question is to Brad. I am really interested in the case study and Brad you mentioned the real success that you have got with the exit strategy as well. That is certainly one of the concerns around meanwhile use accommodation, so would you be open to exploring that a little bit further or giving us some more thoughts around how you made a success of the exit strategy?

Capt McIVER: Thanks for that question. Yes, absolutely happy to provide some more detail there. The important thing for The Salvation Army in this instance was that we partnered with Department of Communities and Justice, as is our role as a specialist homelessness service provider. We, in fact, also were partnering with Vinnies at the time and TFE Hotels. So the precursor to the Stanmore House project really was the meanwhile use of a number of TFE Hotels (Ibis, Adina) by ourselves and Vinnies, to ensure that we were able to safely de-congregate facilities in the inner city of Sydney, which previously had been high congregate care in terms of numbers and obviously, as we all understand now, COVID-19 is a significant virus which spreads quickly in those sorts of situations.

So with help, with DCJ, we were able to decant those facilities to a safe level, a manageable level and the hotels were the first port of call. The important thing there to note for the Committee is that moving from locations where we had shared amenities, very small rooms and congregate dining areas, et cetera, to individual units of accommodation with standalone cooking facilities, with in-house amenities for individuals and privacy, that then immediately impacted not only the ability for us to avoid the spreading of COVID-19, but also immediately had an impact on people's health and wellbeing, their safety, their security and we saw rapid progress for people in stabilising their situation and their willingness to consider a journey to more permanent housing.

As those—as more traditional business came online, the availability of that particular form of meanwhile use through hotel accommodation was proving less viable and so The Salvation Army, in consultation with DCJ, put forward the potential meanwhile use of Stanmore House. So that then, fully self-contained serviced apartments essentially— where people's dignity could be maintained, but the conversation in both situations from the beginning was, 'what is the exit strategy?' Now kudos to the New South Wales Government and the Together Home program, which you may be familiar with, which then offered a prioritised entry to either social housing and/or Together Home housing through a partnership with community housing providers, with specialist homelessness services like The Salvation Army, providing the intensive case management support. So there was a pre-planned focused effort, collaborating across sector and across government to ensure that people landed securely and safely into longer-term accommodation.

There does remain a question with regards to the support period. The contracts at the moment for support

for Together Home are two years and so there is a question for us as a sector with government to answer very shortly, but certainly that has been a very positive way forward. We have seen people who previously were on the streets now not only secure in their own accommodation and stable, but also accessing education, training and employment pathways and certainly on a road to independence which they may not have considered previously.

The CHAIR: Brad, can I just ask you, just with that style of accommodation due to COVID, without the communal kitchens, but you were saying that that seemed to bring people stability more quickly when they were in self-serviced apartments, what is your view then on boarding houses, just as a question, working in this area, where it is communal kitchens and communal spaces?

Capt McIVER: I think the important thing that The Salvation Army would say is that for some people, and I will use women over 55 as an example, anecdotally our experience would suggest that for women over 55 as a growing number of the homeless population, it is actually better in fact for, and people would choose to live together and share spaces such as kitchens and living areas and that sort of thing. So, in short, the response would be that we need to be aware of the individual needs of people who are at risk of experiencing homelessness and we need to have a range of responses that match those. And so certainly The Salvation Army would not discount boarding houses as part of a homeless to housing continuum, but they are only part of that response and the individuals that would access those properties and the mix of individuals that we would offer placement in those properties would need to be well considered and the various risks taken into account.

The CHAIR: Thank you. Jenny, I think you had a question.

Ms LEONG: Yes, thank you Chair and thanks so much Brian and Brad. I think that we would all agree, I mean even by its very name, meanwhile use is a temporary situation. We have heard from both of you and many of the submissions that actually it is a failure of the government to have invested adequately in social and affordable housing that sees this as the case. I wonder, it is wonderful to hear of the exit plans and the Together Home program, it is a huge success for many people, but we know that that backlog is so huge. I wonder if you can talk about how you see the potential risks, if the government was to say, 'oh look there is a new shinier thing over here called meanwhile use', but do it at such a large scale, we just see people being in that temporary accommodation but no clear pipeline for ongoing social and affordable housing and how you would suggest the government addresses that, or the Committee makes recommendations to actually address that backlog.

Capt McIVER: Brian, I might defer to you on that question, if you are willing and able.

Mr MURNANE: Yes, sure. Thanks for the question. My experience with meanwhile use, I think, was that it was a great short-term opportunity to be—ultimately to put people who were experiencing homelessness into accommodation. That [inaudible] we had always experienced with it and I had experience of working, using housing that was planned for demolition at Minto and at Airds Bradbury and we had somewhere around 60 of those units. But because they were all in one precinct, there was one precinct at Minto and another precinct at Airds, they had to be—the people had to move out at a certain time. Yes, we knew that, the date when we had to move them out, but the housing system was and still is, just cannot cope with large numbers to move people in, because you push people who are on the priority list further back down the list because you need to get the people that you are housing in the meanwhile use housing into mainstream housing. So we were able to get them into community housing, public housing and some private housing, but it was spread from Newcastle, Sydney and across the Wollongong area.

We operate a large number of, 384 in fact, transitional houses. These people are coming from refuges and hostels into—they are not coming from the street, they are coming from these refuges into our transitional housing and the problem that we have is increasing length of delay in being able to house people on the public housing list—into public housing or into community housing because there is just not the housing there. So what was originally slated as three to six months is now taking 18 months to two-and-a-half years for people to move from transitional housing into mainstream housing. There is insufficient funding available for the operation of transitional housing currently. The Society—of the 384 transitional housing properties that we have, we have to subsidise that by about \$1100 per unit of housing per year in order to keep it operational. The length of time, as I said, that we can move people through that system into longer-term housing is—continues to increase and increase. So it is becoming less effective because people can't move from the refuges into transitional housing, the refuges are choked up so people on the street cannot get into the refuges and the hostels.

Ms LEONG: Thank you so much. I really appreciate your articulating that problem, which I think the sector and yourselves and many others and including myself have been talking about for a very long time. It is really good to have that on the record because my fear around that is that we will see this as yet another potential solution, which is again just another temporary fix on what is a longer-term need for investment. So thanks Chair, I will leave it there.

The CHAIR: Brian, can I just ask, in relation to something in your submission, just regarding the mandatory inclusion of zoning targets for key workers, would you like to just perhaps speak to that?

Mr MURNANE: Yes, well we were looking at that as an option just to try and increase the supply of affordable housing. The problem in the housing market is that the people who make a community work cannot afford to live in those communities, so they are being forced further and further out. So around many parts of Sydney, people commute from Lithgow, the Blue Mountains and Hunter, because they cannot afford to live in the Sydney area. So what we were looking at is to try to find ways that we could get more money into the system to generate funds for more affordable housing so that people could live in the community where they work.

The CHAIR: Okay, thank you.

Mr SAUNDERS: Madam Chair, I might just put on the record, I have been, and probably some other members of this Committee have been part of developing work on a New South Wales housing strategy, so I certainly take the points that are being raised here, but it is worth noting that the government is working towards a strategy which includes social and affordable housing. People in regions are under that same scenario where some people cannot now afford to live in some of the towns that have grown really well due to interest from city areas, but part of the strategy going forward is, and needs to be, around people that live there being able to afford to live there and their children being able to afford to live there. So that is part of a housing strategy which I think is worth recognising while we are talking about those things.

Can I just ask, Brad, you gave the Stanmore House example, it is a really good example; one of the things we have talked about though is other buildings that maybe do not have all of the stuff there. You are talking about bedrooms and ensuites and that sort of stuff being in the building. What about meantime use of other buildings that may have large spaces but do not have all the facilities? Sometimes that is the case in a regional city, for example. How do you see them being transformed and is it worth trying to do that?

Capt McIVER: Thanks for that question and it is an important question for us to answer. I think we, at The Salvation Army, we would start with similar principles in understanding the value of a person and the ability for us to be able to provide safe, secure accommodation, even if that is short-term, meanwhile use. So as we were to look at potentially underutilised or unutilised properties, whether they are government owned, privately owned or otherwise, how is it that we can best make those facilities fit for purpose? I think the encouragement from The Salvation Army would be that we not rush headlong into opportunities, but really do take a steady and well-managed approach with good consideration to risk.

I think it is also important to understand how local communities might embrace and support meanwhile use in their community, to be making decisions in isolation to communities, particularly regional communities, could potentially be problematic. So one of the things that The Salvation Army would invite is an all-of-community consideration to a response to homelessness and the risk of homelessness and certainly COVID-19 and its impact on the economy and individuals, the increasing level of underemployment and the financial pressures as various government assistances roll back as we come out of COVID-19, would indicate to The Salvation Army that we would fully expect an increasing risk for individuals and families of homelessness.

So in terms of meanwhile use, we would say that there is a place for that in the homeless to housing system. With the New South Wales Government's housing strategy, it is important that we understand if meanwhile use is a part of that, then for how long will particular properties be online. The other comment that The Salvation Army would make, and it was part of our submission, is really whose responsibility is it in terms of investing in any minor capital works or expenditures to establish meanwhile use. Is that sitting with the provider or the agency not-for-profit, or is it sitting with government or a combination and perhaps even invitation to private sector contributors? The other is then, where does the risk sit? So there is much to be considered, but certainly there would be value in us considering meanwhile use as part of an overarching, well-planned homeless to housing strategy.

The other comment The Salvation Army would make is that it really is a local government, state government and federal government responsibility; and many of the endeavours that we have looked at from a social housing, social and affordable housing perspective as a community housing provider through Salvos Housing, as our community housing entity, have often provided an interest or an indication of an interest from private investors to purchase homes for the express use of the community housing sector. However, there are some taxation laws in place currently which make that less than favourable for the individual investor and of course then there is a question around risk and those sorts of things. So certainly there is much to be considered, but I think I will stop there in answering your question.

Mr SAUNDERS: Thanks Brad, I really appreciate that. Just on numbers, I have just confirmed, so as part of the strategy but separately to that through Property New South Wales, there is around 900 new social and affordable properties this year and there are quite a few of those in my electorate. I have been and inspected them and there has been some great resourcing through TAFE to actually do apprenticeships building some of these new units in Dubbo. There is about 1400 in the pipeline as well, so that is good news, that is not meantime use, that are new homes.

Just quickly Chair, I might ask Brian a quick one. Brian you also mentioned a couple of centres, including Dubbo, where you do have a footprint there. Do you see that there is much of a difference between regional cities and/or towns and metro and a different way of approaching things?

Mr MURNANE: Yes, there is. The problem, the huge need—I don't know if it was you or someone else referred to a growing need, particularly in Dubbo, Albury, Parkes and Forbes to a lesser extent, where people from the metropolitan area have moved out there and put pressure on the local market, people are being priced out of those local markets. We have land in those areas. The difficulty that we have is in around funding the construction there because the banks don't see it—they see it as a higher risk so they are reluctant to fund community housing organisations to build in those regional areas, which makes it difficult for us. So yes, we are in Dubbo, we would like to build more in places like Coonabarabran, Coonamble, Parkes and Forbes. But at the moment we do not have the funding to do so. But we do have land in those locations and there is an increasing amount of need for housing in all of those areas.

Mr SAUNDERS: Thanks Brian.

The CHAIR: Thank you. Any other questions? Trish.

Ms DOYLE: Thank you Chair and thank you to Brad and Brian for your participation in this inquiry and your work, I really appreciate it. I just wanted to say, as a little girl who often lived in refuges with her mum, brothers and sisters and in a car from time to time, it was always the Salvos and St Vincent de Paul that helped out, so I just want to say thanks for your work, it is remembered for a lifetime. You talk about tenants with chronic health and complex needs and the fact that there needs to be not just a roof over people's heads, but there needs to actually be wraparound services. But before we even get to that, providing that roof is very difficult and you talk about where the risk actually sits. There is a community group or a couple of community groups here in the Blue Mountains who are desperately trying to access some Department of Transport land for a tiny homes village, to care specifically for mountains folk in those situations. I am just wondering whether you wanted to talk a bit more about the obstacles around where the risk sits when government does not always necessarily come to the party in these situations.

Mr MURNANE: I am happy to just say a bit and Brad, you might like to add. The risk around—that we have is around providing support for people with high needs, particularly people who are suffering from some form of mental illness or addiction. We can successfully house them and provide them with long-term, secure, affordable housing, but we must have that support. To make that tenancy work, to work effectively, requires some ongoing support, various levels of support, depending on the individual. Now the social and the SAHF, the Social and Affordable Housing Fund, is a classic example where we have support funding as part of the program [inaudible]...

Ms LEONG: Chair, if we...

Mr SAUNDERS: Brian, you might have to take a step to the left or the right, we are just losing you.

The CHAIR: Yes, we are losing you.

Mr MURNANE: Are you? Is that better?

The CHAIR: That is better, yes.

Mr MURNANE: Yes, so the point that I was making is that high-needs tenancies can work very well and become very secure and stable, but it needs to have wraparound support services. That is not always available for transitional housing and meanwhile use housing. Yes, you house them—you meet their immediate needs of having a roof over their head, but people with complex needs have more than just a roof, they need a whole lot of other supports to have them integrated back into the community and make them independent.

The CHAIR: Thank you. Brad did you want to speak to that at all?

Capt McIVER: Look, just briefly, I would agree entirely with what Brian's observations are there. I think in addition, one of the things that is really important, aside from the provision of accommodation, a roof over someone's head, is that support and there is not always the availability of trained supports in the area. I think the other thing that is important as more and more community and small community organisations and even large organisations like our own seek to look at creative but time-sensitive responses to homelessness. But we need to ensure that appropriate intake and assessment of individuals and families into those places and spaces is in place and take into consideration the risks for them coming into a space that might be higher in congregation to perhaps an individual unit of accommodation or what have you.

I think the other comment I would reiterate from The Salvation Army's perspective, is of course the local community's willingness to embrace a response to homelessness and those sorts of short-term responses in lieu of a longer-term option. But I think one of the things that we know for sure is that the longer people spend on the street, the longer people spend couch surfing, the greater the impact on their physical, mental and emotional

wellbeing and certainly there is evidence to show that for people that are sleeping rough, there is significant reductions in their mortality over time. So it is a serious issue that we need to be focused on as a community and cross sector to come up with appropriate solutions, but no one solution will answer the question that we are trying to grapple with this morning.

The CHAIR: Thank you, Brad. Well look, thank you both for appearing and joining us today for this inquiry and you will also be provided with a copy of the transcripts of your evidence for corrections. So we do sincerely thank you for being here today and also putting in submissions.

Mr MURNANE: Thank you. Thanks to the Committee, thank you.

Capt McIVER: Thank you, much appreciated.

Ms LEONG: Thank you.

The CHAIR: Thank you both.

(The witnesses withdrew.)

(Short adjournment)

JOHN ENGELER, CEO, Shelter NSW, sworn and examined before the Committee via videoconference

The CHAIR: John, before we start, do you have any questions about the hearing process at all?

Mr ENGELER: No, none at all, all good. It is very straightforward and looking forward to helping you as much as we can.

The CHAIR: Just to let you know, John, I am Wendy Lindsay, the state member for East Hills chairing the inquiry and to my right is Dugald Saunders, the member for Dubbo who is the Deputy Chair. To my left is David, the member for Wyong. Via Webex, we have Trish Doyle, member for the Blue Mountains and Jenny Leong, member for Newtown.

Mr ENGELER: Good, thank you very much, Wendy.

The CHAIR: John, would you like to start with an opening statement?

Mr ENGELER: I would, if you do not mind and obviously we have already made a submission, so a lot of the details are there, but our statement is really a highlight and a continuing affirmation about what it is that we would like to say on this particular topic. So first of all, I would like to acknowledge the Traditional Owners of the land on which I am coming to you from, which is the Gadigal people of the Eora nation and I pay my respects to Elders past, present and emerging.

I would like to thank the Committee for its interest in this important topic. We do commend the New South Wales Government for its commitment to double their 20-year housing strategy and for its explicit commitment to reducing street homelessness by 50 per cent by 2025. That is highly significant. We note and support the dual housing strategy, high goals of providing immediate support for people experiencing homelessness and the commitment to providing better housing for those people across [inaudible]. We do understand that the primary focus of this inquiry will be about what is happening in the immediate situation.

Just going back, we do understand that this inquiry is primarily focused on what we can do immediately and to that we offer our, again, commendation. Our submission did offer some quite specific and detailed comments about the idea of meanwhile use, especially some of the planning and practical, technical or logistical requirements in refitting sites. So we are happy to take some questions about that later, but our submission is quite detailed about that particular issue.

We do want to strongly assert that there is no substitute, however, for dramatically increasing the stock of social and affordable rental housing across the state. Transitional housing options should be temporary as people move into longer-term, secure, more appropriate and more affordable housing and right now, right across New South Wales and for a very long time, there simply is not enough stock of social housing and increasingly affordable housing for the people we represent, which in the case of Shelter NSW, is predominantly people in the lowest 40 per cent of incomes.

So our report made three big calls. One, let us dramatically increase the stock of social housing all across New South Wales, and I know that regionally that is something that has come to the attention of all of us more recently. Let us build and acquire up to 5000, indeed at least 5000, additional social housing dwellings per year for at least the next 10 years and keep it there. This is not just required to house homeless people, but it is to protect vulnerable people from becoming homeless in the first instance, so upstream if you like. We need to stop

growing the pool of people who would otherwise fall into homelessness by increasing private tenancy market protections, such as removing no-grounds eviction, which can be used to circumvent limits around annual rent increases, outlawing rent bidding, which is being considered in other jurisdictions.

We need to ensure government processes for exiting or transitioning people do not in fact tip people over into more precarious types of housing and homelessness and we do see this in other areas of policy that we are all involved with, so that is corrective services, juvenile justice, health and most especially and very topically at the moment, the out-of-home care system, noting that there is a particularly disproportionate impact when we talk about out-of-home care for Aboriginal people.

The third big of our calls was to advocate that the Commonwealth join together for reforms around the bigger tax financial settings that impact to us at a state level. I think it is naive for us to think about these things in isolation. We are increasingly aware of not just the bi, but the tripartite arrangement when it comes to local, state and federal government and the way in which tax, the tax settings, all are part of this, cannot have a legitimate conversation about immediate, long-term or sustainable use without understanding fully the tax implications and I will talk about that a bit more later if you like. So definitely we need to fix ultimately where the rubber hits the road, as when we have got such low income that a lot of people are forced into housing stress because they have got such low incomes in the first instance. Whether that is statutory or wage, a lot of people are having difficulty meeting their rent, paying too much of their household income in rent because of the low incomes that they are otherwise experiencing.

We are happy to talk about all these topics, but we want to draw your attention to that bigger issue. As much as we are absolutely supportive of meanwhile use, some boutique particular areas of innovation, very happy to applaud that, the big game here—and sometimes those smaller projects are great, but they could almost mask, with too much time on them, what is needed at a more fundamental or structural level. That is a huge commitment to social and affordable housing at an enterprise-grade level. Government needs to be the one driving this, not following when it is needed.

We are just about to release a report ourselves that I know is interesting for a couple of members in particular about the increased problems that we are seeing in regional areas across New South Wales. So by LGA, the worst are Central Coast, Byron, Cessnock, Newcastle, Coffs, Lismore, Maitland, Shellharbour, Tamworth, Tweed and then of course Wollongong. It really is a tripartisan problem when we think about the, again, issue about all levels of government, but that regional New South Wales is increasing, particularly post-pandemic, an increase in housing need and housing stress. So the private housing market continues to fail an increasing number of people right across the state. We see market failure. Social, affordable and specialist housing is not met by the market alone. We appreciate recent announcements by the government. The reality is that social housing construction is not even keeping up with net population growth, let alone demand.

The Centre for Social Impact for New South Wales recently, in June, released a report which is very sobering, showing that basically once you sift through all of the announcements, establish what is legitimately new, what are not re-announcements or bringing forward that which would already be happening, or rather replacement of existing stock with same—so that is not net new, that is replacing—you are left with a sobering headline which is we are not even getting 10,000 dwellings across 10 years. So that report, which we can make available to you, 10,000 dwellings not even meeting that, across 10 years, from 2016 to 2026, we find that remarkable given the increasing demand, population growth and the demonstrated need especially now in regional areas.

We firmly believe that the New South Wales Government has tied its own hands effectively by insisting that LAHC, its own social housing development arm, must be returned to government at no net cost. That seems anachronistic in this time, particularly when we look at Sydney property prices. The opportunity to really leverage off that rather than run from it, we find it particularly disappointing that LAHC has its hands tied. Probably one of the only organisations, all jokes aside, that thinks it is not a good time to invest in property in New South Wales. So with that in mind, if there is no particular questions, I will take any questions you might have of me.

The CHAIR: Thank you. Any questions from the web, Jenny or Trish? Jenny.

Ms LEONG: Thank you Chair and thank you so much, John, for that summary and introduction and for the work that Shelter does and for your submission. I guess the housing crisis—and I appreciate you acknowledge the New South Wales housing strategy which the housing sector has been pushing for the State Government to have for a very long time now, it is good to see that we finally have one. But I think it is very clear that this focus on meanwhile use is a band-aid solution, if you like, to what is a failure to have invested and planned adequately for social and affordable housing. I wonder, from Shelter's perspective, what should the government be doing immediately as an urgent action to address the shortfall in public, social and affordable housing, so that if we are to have innovative solutions for meanwhile use for the next, say, six to 12 months, those people that are in those meanwhile use properties are then able to be moved into long-term, safe, secure and affordable housing? What is the urgency that needs to be done now so the meanwhile use people, people that are accessing those sites, can

then have housing and not be just added to the hundred thousand people on the public housing waiting list?

Mr ENGELER: So the most obvious thing that would come to mind is cease any redevelopment at the moment which unnecessarily is relocating people. There are a number of sites around Sydney at the moment where by definition we are adding to the pressure for alternate housing at an affordable rate. So there is a lot of redevelopment that LAHC is doing at two or three sites where the most immediate thing we could do is agree we should be able to redevelop a site or add to the stock without it meaning two things: dis-housing or dislocating people who are already there and certainly in the more long term, making sure that that is a net addition to stock.

So we have seen a number of sites where, on a good count, we are lucky if we need 20 more pillows, 100 more pillows. We could be spending hundreds of millions. I am thinking of Waterloo South, where despite lots of money and lots of energy and lots of effort, it looks like the net result over a number of years might be as little as 100 more people off the housing waiting list to house. That would be my first thing, is to adopt a strategy which says when we are talking about redevelopment, we mean development, we do not mean knocking over existing properties, we look and choose sites that already have potential for uplift, relatively easy, not controversial, they are older stock that could be reasonably easily redeveloped without them necessarily involving huge amounts of dislocation of existing tenants.

One thing I might just say, so for example, if I could just go off a little bit, one of the things that we note, which is always a bit disappointing, is the very small number of three, four and five-bedroom dwellings. In fact it is difficult to find out exactly how many three-bedroom dwellings there are. We all know from the waiting list, not only is it 50,000-plus people waiting, but people waiting for three bedrooms or more, I'm pretty certain in every area, wait at least 10 years. By the time that 10 years has happened, invariably you do not need the three bedrooms. So one of the pleas that we might have, as an advocacy body in this, is government needs to step up its commitment to three bedrooms. Three bedrooms I think was once described in a small development in Cowper and Wentworth, the State Government has reimagined to make 100 per cent public housing, three bedrooms is not for large families. A lot of families would need a third bedroom. We seem to think that three bedrooms is somehow an odd thing, not at all. We have got lots of people that are in severely overcrowded dwellings, so just even that...

Ms LEONG: We would hope the new Premier would have more of an insight in the need for larger family homes than perhaps – he may hopefully recognise the need for that now.

Mr ENGELER: That is right. He and I share that thing, I am the youngest of nine, so we both come from dwellings that were severely overcrowded, so yes, it is a bit of a personal passion. So yes, indeed what we are often seeing, and it is tied up very quickly in this idea, the market fails people repeatedly. I think what we are seeing through, whether it is community housing organisations or government, an over-reliance on new one and two-bedroom dwellings. There is lots of two-bedroom dwellings that the market would otherwise produce. What it does not produce is affordable three-bedroom, three-dwelling anythings. I suggest that LAHC, if it exists as an alternative to the market failure, it needs to think about larger families and have a particular program.

Where we find, for example, that might otherwise be expensive in city areas, I get that, but in regional areas we can see huge demand for families also experiencing housing stress. Three bedrooms, when you are talking about adding a third or a fourth bedroom, say a bathroom as well to an existing three-bedroom cottage in a small town like Tumut, it is not a huge planning conundrum, it can be built very quickly. But to answer your earlier point, Jenny, not only does it solve, or at least address rather, an immediate housing need, exacerbated by COVID in regional areas, it does stimulate the economy, it does provide local construction jobs at a skill level that could easily be found in those particular areas.

Mr SAUNDERS: Can I just jump in there quickly, and I am not arguing with what you are saying, but in regional areas, John, one of the things that we have seen recently is in fact a lot of single women and I am talking 55-plus, that are living in three or four-bedroom homes, that are trying to give them up to give to a family because they want something smaller. So a lot of the developments we are seeing in places like Dubbo is actually reutilising some land, and some of these homes are on an acre, where you can actually knock down that home, keep the person on site, on the same block, but in a one or two-bedroom unit with 10 other people as opposed to them living in a three-bedroom house by themselves. So there is also the flexibility needed to—a lot of people are empty nesters now, they've lost their—the family has moved on. I think it's just an awareness around what is important because not all sizes fit all people and I think a mix is probably what we need to look at.

Mr ENGELER: Thank you for those comments and you are absolutely right. One of the things that we have found is that often the houses that are more generous are actually on the edge of town and what people are telling us is that they really want to be located right in the centre of town so they can walk to things and not have to have a car, can walk to the chemist, the doctor, so as people get older, obviously they need to be able to have a good—and a lot of our towns do not necessarily have easy planning systems when it comes to shop-top housing or high densities right in the middle of the town or at the edge of the town. They tend to be a bit further out, which is your point. We do notice a bit of a paradox there, that properties tend to be a bit further away.

Mr SAUNDERS: What about flatmate.com scenario? Do you want to tell us a little bit about how that works and how you might see that expanding?

Mr ENGELER: Look, I would not profess to be an expert there. What I like to see is that there is innovation available in matching people, but even very good systems like that—I am answering a text this morning from somebody who is desperately trying to negotiate, get her rights within one of those schemes. Those schemes are good, they do need regulation, but in terms of people's longer-term, more secure housing, I think we would be—no matter how good that the private sector would otherwise be at matching people, there still will need to be—whether it's a dwelling or a subsidy or some sort of support, government needs to be available to help support or intervene. We do need the direct commitment by government in some of these things that you will not just be solved, I do not think, by the...

Mr SAUNDERS: Private sector.

Mr ENGELER: Yes, well not just the private sector, but using digital transformation, I think. Those schemes have certainly always existed. I think they go a long way to matching people that generally have a need which is not just financial, that there is usually some sort of other social need. At the end of the day, we will always need intervention.

The CHAIR: Can I just ask you, just at the end of your submission you talk about juvenile justice and exiting the system and struggling with finding accommodation, not leaving the system already being looked after, we did an inquiry last year into street sleeping homelessness and there had been quite a lot of work done in that space as far as the adult system is concerned, what is your suggestion in regards to that part of young people leaving the juvenile justice system and leaving into secure housing?

Mr ENGELER: I think the general comment that we would make is that if you have already got two of those problems, so homelessness, younger people have difficulty accessing homelessness, so age; income, invariably low, very low and low prospects of employment income of a high level, if you are leaving the juvenile justice system; and then finally we know already that people exiting the criminal justice system at whatever age have huge difficulty securing appropriate accommodation and indeed even our own State sometimes makes it difficult for people to choose areas where they might otherwise. So that is just a general comment that we have got.

What I suppose it answers is not just purely a voucher. If you say to somebody, 'here is a voucher, you can go and access your own accommodation in the private market', make it more affordable. Work that we've been involved with, quite high-level academic work about discrimination in the private rental market for example, makes it very clear that you might be able to easily afford a property that's available but other forces are at play to make you be able to secure that accommodation easily. Particularly when you're young and have had an experience with the juvenile justice or the criminal justice system generally. Government needs to—the analogy that I might use, it sort of works in a different area of the policy but I think answers the same thing.

We know that younger people exiting the out-of-home care system, so after the ages of 18, what we used to call foster care, there's a particular opportunity where we know when people are well supported with housing between 18 and 25, they tend to go on and have very successful adult lives after the age of 25. But if that support is not provided, and it's not just housing, it's housing and other things, but it's really important that the foster system or the out-of-home care system stops payments, as I understand, at 18. There's a huge number of people who exit the out-of-home care system. We've seen a couple of great but boutique things that we—say the Foyer model for example, St George Community Housing, with the assistance of government and Uniting Care and Social Ventures Australia developed 53 units of housing for young people for that very reason.

But in that same way, I know the market wouldn't just provide that in and of itself. You could have all of the incentives and tickets in the world and vouchers that you could give to a younger person. You need some more scaffolding between those ages of 18 and 25. Housing that the state owns, either through its own mechanisms or a community housing provider, demonstrably has a huge difference and makes successful lives post that window, between 18 and, say, 23 to 25. So similarly with the criminal justice system and younger people, if there's not that supported, I don't mean over-supported or mean over-surveillance, but gentle support when it's required does make a difference.

It is difficult not to think that the ownership of those dwellings, resting in the arms of government itself in whatever mechanism, is the better way to do that. Leaving it to the vagaries of the private sector wouldn't give it the certainty.

Mr HARRIS: John, if I could, I'm very interested in the Youth Foyer model. We actually, prior to the last election, tried to get up one of those connected to a TAFE redevelopment on the Central Coast and I know they're quite successful in Victoria. Can you just talk to us a little bit more about that model?

Mr ENGELER: Yes. So, again, we are particularly interested and St George Community Housing is the

one that we watch and I think if you haven't been there it's certainly worth the visit, on City Road. If I can just make a more general point, we find it difficult sometimes when there's almost a dual—a binary thinking that we've got where we see some areas of government, through the community housing organisations, doing great things like Youth Foyers, City Road, you know just at the edge of the city. 200 metres down the road government is trying to pull apart and sell a really good development at Glebe. We scratch our heads sometimes and go, gosh, not only is it difficult when government's doing well, it makes it really hard to celebrate that when 200 or 300 metres down the road they're almost doing the opposite. Anyway, I digress.

The good thing about that particular model is that it was funded through a number of organisations, spearheaded and provided through a CHP, Community Housing Provider. Who not only did they redevelop the site for the 53 units, as we understand it, and it's a bit probably different to other models of the Foyer that we've seen. There are also on the same site 20 units of affordable housing that are just available to people of, you know, key workers. The great thing about that is that it—and I think some of the commentary that we've got on the work that we've done on Foyer is it can't be too prescriptive in terms of you can't tell people to be doing too much education. It needs to have that gentle support when it's needed and also it has to have the opportunity for people to exit out of that in a more graduated way.

The fact that the site at City Road has a 53 unit, clearly auspiced by Uniting, who run the program. Once people leave that they may say, well I still like this area, I still like this building even. I don't want to be formally part of that program, I'm getting a bit older, so they could then naturally transition to the 20 units of affordable housing. So that idea that—there's lots more people that are more expert in Youth Foyers than we are and certainly the model's been around for a number of years. But it gives a nod to the fact that somebody who needs occasional support, not so onerous that it makes it difficult for them to achieve it, but that it's there as they need it and the point that we like is that it's co-located with other units of affordable housing in an area where the people could naturally graduate out of there as they get older.

We do have a report which we're certainly happy to make available to the Committee that we're just putting through the peers at the moment, through our peer organisations, other providers of Foyers. But, yes, we're often looking for good news stories and I think we could all agree that commitment by government through finance, through land, through programs and through a community housing organisation that's well-regulated running it, we're very happy to support those sorts of things moving forward. I think they're a great example of what to do, particularly around youth out-of-home care. Whether that's regionally or in metro areas. So thanks David.

Mr HARRIS: Yes. Just on that, too, in terms of the affordable aspect. One of the biggest problems we hear is how you keep properties affordable. They're built originally under the affordable banner but they obviously then get sold on, et cetera. What sort of structures do you think could be put in place to ensure they remain affordable and it's not just for the first five years, for example?

Mr ENGELER: A couple of things. One is how they're built and generally we've all got experience in this. If you're building a product that you want to last forever and you own it, then you would put more energy into the upfront build. You choose materials, you put more power points in, you have a higher grade of finish when it comes to the benches, all the way through to the tiles that you use. I think admitting—again, it's that conundrum that we often find. We're already talking about something that the market doesn't provide so let's not wrongly compare ourselves to what the market may produce for \$3,000 per square metre. Let's concede that it needs to be a higher investment at the front end because we want to own that building for 40 years and not sell it off.

I think that would be the first thing, acknowledging that owning and holding is different to owning and selling. Rightly or wrongly, we've got—most people who are builders involved in the construction industry are—we buy properties, re-sell them or re-develop them and we move them on. It's a different mindset. Whether that's aged care, Youth Foyers, disability, you need to concede that the product that you're building has to have more of an investment in it. It's of little value where people wrongly, I think, tout how cheap it was for them to build when in fact we needed them to have built it to a quality not a price in the first place. That would be the first thing.

Secondly, I think just conceding that buildings do have a life and if you do want to make them last forever and optimise the development schedule, which could go as 40 years, make them so they're strata approved. Even if they're not strataed, you would certainly build them in a way so that the strata could be registered and that they're run in a similar way. There's nothing wrong with doing that. Very little, relatively, is required to do that at the development stage upfront. Very difficult to retrospectively put a strata over a building that's already been built. So there's some practical things. I think the main thing is just to concede that these things will have a life. You know, sometimes I question the community housing sector, are they friend or foe? I think generally they're good, some of the big ones are really good at building, operating and maintaining these properties. They always need to be checked to make sure they're doing the right thing. But that would be the other thing, is make sure that they're managed appropriately by a reputable organisation. How you keep them affordable to the tenant is to rent them

through a community housing organisation. That's the easiest thing you can do.

Mr HARRIS: Thank you. Thanks, Chair.

The CHAIR: Thank you. Any other questions from any of the members? Okay, well thank you...

Ms DOYLE: Can I just make a comment?

The CHAIR: Oh, sorry Trish.

Ms DOYLE: Thank you, John. Thank you for your work and would you also, on behalf of the Committee, thank your team. They do excellent work.

Mr ENGELER: Thank you, Trish. Very much appreciated, thank you, and it is absolutely a team effort so I'll certainly pass that on. Thank you.

The CHAIR: Thank you John for joining us today and...

Ms LEONG: Sorry, Chair, can I just ask something on notice, just for John, just in terms of, I'm aware of the time. But I just wanted to ask John if there's any more details around what you think could be done in terms of the barriers to LAHC and to the CHPs actually investing in more housing? And what you see as the barriers in terms of the current programs, but what could be alleviated? It would be amazing to get any additional thoughts you have specifically around that. Particularly given your points around the Youth Foyer model and then the selling off of public housing and redevelopment of Waterloo and other places. If there are specific ideas that you think Shelter can see that a big development's happening in the state now that could be fed into this meanwhile use process that could be halted and redirected. It would be really great to get some of those specifics from Shelter so we can have that to consider from the Committee.

Mr ENGELER: Sure. I'll be as brief as I can. Thank you very much for that opportunity, Jenny. The one thing I'd say is that we are I think facing, from our point of view, the fallibility of the 70:30 Communities Plus model. It just seems anachronistic now, given everything that's happened in property in New South Wales, post-COVID. This idea that the only thing that could happen to big, major sites in the centre of a city like Sydney is that of 100 per cent current total public housing, the best that we can come up with is 30 per cent retained as social, 70 per cent sold. I think we're seeing in the case of one at the moment before us, which is 600 Elizabeth Street, there was once a glimmer of hope where it was going to be built-to-rent, held for a period, that's now looking like build-to-sell and no direct segment of what we'd call and what we agree to be affordable housing.

So something between low income social housing, 30 per cent of your statutory income through the private market. The community housing sector in particular, which I think the state of New South Wales has spent the last 25 years building and giving capacity to and proven. I think St George, who I used to work for I must declare, but all of them are capable. They're all very capable and we've given them the resources to be developers. St George have built a property in Gibbons Street, Redfern recently. So we at Shelter find it a bit odd, in fact anachronistic, that the Communities Plus model doesn't have a deliberate opportunity for the community housing sector. Either as a take-out partner using their affordable housing, so that's discount to market, or as a developer or both. Time and again we see small developments, large developments. It's almost like it's—yes, I would be a bit disappointed if I worked in the community housing sector. Lots of potential, lots of capacity, lots of proven runs on the board and not being given the opportunity at the very main table from which they came. That would be one.

Yes, I think that there's a possibility there that we can reimagine. If the best that we can do on sites in the centre of Sydney, they're so difficult, all we can do is to sell all the properties that are there and only ever keep 30 per cent, I think we need to go back to the drawing board and get the calculator out. I think we've allowed ourselves to do what's easy rather than what's right and I just don't think it's acceptable that we compel LAHC to have a zero model. That they must be able to operate to government with zero cost. We have Landcom that returns a profit of, I don't know, \$200 million every couple of years. It could be funnelled into public housing. That \$200 million, for example. Then other things which I'm happy to talk about at another time. Stamp duty, generally. New South Wales has benefited tremendously, tremendously from stamp duty. \$12 million it's looking like this year, \$10 billion last year. Billion, not million.

If we think about it, there is a natural next step to solve the property paradox, that we call it in New South Wales in particular. If you're paying any sort of stamp duty, and as we move to the potential for that to be land tax, there's a really good opportunity to build in a continuous fund to get New South Wales back up to its five per cent, as a minimum, public housing, which we used to pride ourselves on. I think we're sitting at about four point seven now and falling. I think New South Wales could really do well to think about the natural opportunity to divert at least some of the property taxes it moves from stamp duty to land tax as a continuous funding stream for public housing. Because you're either one or the other. You're either needing support or you're paying the tax. One naturally is inverse of the other. There is a nexus of a relationship between those. That's probably my main ones. I'm happy to talk to any other questions or any other information to the Committee.

Ms LEONG: Thank you so much...

The CHAIR: Okay.

Ms LEONG: ...and thanks for letting me jump in with that, Chair.

The CHAIR: Thanks, John. Okay, well thank you for joining us today. We do have another witness ready to go, so we appreciate your time.

Mr ENGELER: Thank you, Wendy. Thank you Committee.

The CHAIR: Okay and if you do send anything through John, would you try and just get it back to us within a week if that's possible, two weeks at the most? Okay.

Mr ENGELER: No problem at all. Thank you, Wendy.

The CHAIR: Thank you. Thanks a lot.

Mr ENGELER: Bye.

(The witness withdrew.)

(Short adjournment)

CRAIG LYONS, Senior Project Worker, Southern Youth and Family Services, affirmed and examined before the Committee via videoconference

TONY DAVIES, CEO, Social Futures, affirmed and examined before the Committee via videoconference

ROSE THOMSON, CEO, Churches Housing Inc., sworn and examined before the Committee via videoconference

The CHAIR: Thank you. Do any of you have any questions in regards to today's proceedings?

Ms THOMSON: No.

The CHAIR: Okay and would you like to start with an opening statement at all, Rose?

Ms THOMSON: Yes, I would. Firstly I want to acknowledge the land of the Darug people from which I am speaking to you from today. I just wanted to say that we are the membership peak body for the faith sector. From Amelie Housing, Anglicare, Baptist Care, Catholic dioceses in a number of regions, to Salvos, to Wesley Mission. All of them are working significantly to offer social and affordable housing in all its forms. The right to safe and secure housing is a basic human right and it's that that we endeavour to serve every day. The faith sector organisations offer so much more than housing. They offer wrap-around social services and of course they have land assets that are open and available for significant partnerships with government and others.

Housing is not something that can be given attention as the winds of matters high on the public opinion list influence the response of government. It is fundamental to a range of societal issues like economic mobility, anti-poverty efforts, human capital investment, community improvement plans and public health. It's the foundation of improvement across all these things. Our regional areas are crying out for help and as I drive out of Parramatta each evening, past the grounds of the beautiful All Saints Church I'm horrified by the growing lines of people waiting to receive food. Some of these people are well dressed and obviously what a recent article in the *Sydney Morning Herald* called, the new homeless are professionals and seeking help.

On radio the other day I heard of a woman in the Northern Rivers who's lived there all of her life. She's spent the last six months in a tent with three children, desperate for housing and can't find anything that she can afford or access because home owners have such great options to choose other seemingly more worthy tenancies. The government's invested well into the social sector in recent times. But when all the data and research of the past decade has identified the need for increase in thousands of homes per year for a number of years, we have a long way to go. I believe the New South Wales government and New South Wales as a state could take the lead in this.

Churches Housing is very open to innovative partnerships with government and others and would be very willing to continue this conversation as you look at a range of options that come before you throughout this hearing. Short-term improvements will not resolve the long-term social issues or the current housing crisis, it's going to take political resolve. We encourage you to be strong and to be bold and courageous with the options that come before you because it's going to need a very resolute pursuit of answers for this issue. We believe that if you stand on the human rights platform and work towards a good outcome, that a number of the organisations that have come to speak to this will be there to help and support the measures seen to be viable. Thank you.

The CHAIR: Thank you, Rose. Craig, would you like to have an opening statement as well?

Mr LYONS: Yes, thanks. I just want to acknowledge that this evidence is being given from the unceded lands of the Wodi people. The Dharawal speaking, saltwater people of the Yuin nation and pay my respects to their Elders, past, present and emerging. I just want to draw out some themes arising from our submission. The first is that the social housing shortage disproportionately affects youth. Young people make up 24 per cent of the homeless population and are routinely discriminated against in the private rental market and that this has intensified during the pandemic. Local research here in the Illawarra has shown that the most recent lockdown has very significantly affected youth employment levels with 15 to 19 year olds employed at less than 70 per cent of pre-lockdown levels and 20 to 24 year olds at about 90 per cent of pre-lockdown levels.

Additionally, levels of income support for unemployed people are inadequate to sustain tenancies in the region. This creates a greater need for more affordable and social housing options while social housing wait times are routinely stretched beyond 10 years. This means that in some locations in our service area, a young person who applies for social housing at 18 may not be placed in housing before they're 30. In the meantime they are left struggling in deeply unaffordable and often exploitative regional rental markets and seeking assistance from overstretched local services. There's an obvious need for additional social housing supply and our submission, along with a number of others, have made that recommendation.

We advocate for housing supply that is permanent or at least has long-term security of tenure and with appropriately funded wrap-around services to ensure that young people are given the support that they need to successfully maintain tenancies throughout their housing careers. This aligns with the strategy of our organisation, which is to safely and responsibly build, acquire and modify appropriately resourced and designed housing stock designed for long-term use. This is the best way to ensure sustainable, long-term community benefit and it's for this reason that we remain somewhat sceptical about the long-term benefits and the long-run geographical implications of temporary use.

The social housing shortage is a structural issue in this State requiring many thousands of dwellings to be constructed every year for many years and thus requires a significant system level response. However something that is often overlooked is that the supply of dwellings in the overall housing system could be adequate but we've manipulated the system in such a way as to produce overheated demand for homes as investment properties. It is estimated that there are approximately 70,000 homes left vacant in New South Wales due to speculation, while there are 51,000 applications on the social housing waitlist. To us, it seems unjust that homes can be left vacant for speculation or taken out of the residential housing system and placed in the tourist economy through short-term rentals while so many people struggle to gain access to secure and sustainable housing.

There's also a significant regional and rural dimension to this problem that's worth highlighting. Our service area stretches from the northern suburbs of Wollongong, as far south to Bega and the Victorian border and as far inland as Queanbeyan, Cooma and Goulburn. In all of these areas our services have noticed an increase in housing stress over the past 24 months, initially as a result of the bushfires and then as a result of the pandemic. Many regional areas are facing labour shortages in lower paying industries such as hospitality and tourism as these workers cannot access affordable housing. For disadvantaged youth, those challenges are even greater. It was recently reported in the ABC that in Bega, for example, where there are a number of homeless young people, more than 150 properties are listed as short-term holiday accommodation while there are only two available for private rental.

From a policy perspective, we believe that short-term and temporary programs won't address what is a structural issue and that large-scale public investment in social housing and related support services to assist young people is required, along with policies that can help to cool the demand, particularly in regional areas that are experiencing such significant growth. A guiding principal in these policies should be quick and affordable access to quality housing which offers long-term security of tenure and that prioritises the needs of its occupants. Thank you.

The CHAIR: Thank you. Tony, would you also like to make an opening statement?

Mr DAVIES: Thank you. Look, I'd also like to acknowledge that I'm meeting—coming to you from unceded Widjabul land of the Bundjalung nation and pay respects to Elders, past, present and future. I note the high cost of sharing the land for our First Nations people is reflected in higher rates of homelessness, the gap in education, health and life expectancy, all of which is exacerbated by the critical lack of social and affordable housing in New South Wales. I'd like to thank the Committee for investigating this vital issue and I also do want to commend my colleagues Craig and Rose and their organisations for their advocacy on this issue. Because I recall two decades ago, and it was two decades ago when I worked at parliament in the Committee system, representatives of your organisations came and spoke about the need for better investment in the social housing market. So thanks for your long-term advocacy.

At the outset, I want to say housing stress and homelessness is at crisis point in regional New South Wales. Our organisation works across the north of the state, from the Hawkesbury River to the Tweed River, west to Broken Hill and east to Byron Bay. Housing affordability, and right now, frankly, just unavailability of housing,

is a concern in every place that we work. Nowhere is this more evident than in Byron where the median house price is now \$2.85 million. That's nearly double that of Greater Sydney and median rents are \$950 a week. Our homelessness work is predominantly in northern New South Wales, so our submission and my evidence will focus on that area and the statistics are sobering. I mean, rental vacancies have always been an issue. They were 0.8 per cent in March but now we're looking, particularly in the coastal areas, of rental vacancies being 0.1 and 0.3 per cent with increases in rental rates of over 20 per cent.

This year's street count identified 345 people sleeping rough in the Northern Rivers region, which was 30 per cent of the total counted in New South Wales and not too far off the 510 counted in all of Greater Sydney and the Blue Mountains. Previous Census figures across multiple Census periods have consistently shown 20 per cent of the rough sleepers in New South Wales are in the Northern Rivers. Social housing wait times top 10 years and in part that's because of the lack of stock. Around three per cent of stock in northern New South Wales, in the Northern Rivers, is social housing compared to over five per cent in New South Wales as a whole. Homelessness funding support, the wrap-around support that Craig talked about, which is so vital to get people into—to help people get their lives back on track, it's set at historical levels and doesn't reflect the reality or proportion of homelessness issues in the Northern Rivers.

As a multi-service agency we see the impact of the housing crisis in all of our work. So in our family support work, in our youth programs, in our mental health programs, headspace, our disability work. Pretty much everyone we work for, and we work with over 20,000 people a year, are affected by the housing crisis. As indeed are our staff. No-grounds evictions affect our staff and it's really hard for people. Which picks up on Craig's point about workforce issues in regional areas. I think it's important to focus on solutions and I will say that, with respect, we don't need more inquiries. We actually need action and action needs resources. I think the most important thing for government is to stop talking and start doing. The first thing is, we do need to invest in social housing.

We know there are massive multiplier effects, for particularly regional communities, that not only provide the housing that people desperately need, but actually the economic stimulus that communities need, far more than big bang projects in metro areas, like tunnels and freeways. Whilst we support the 5,000 housing per year target that our entire sector is advocating for, even if government can't do that, just start building some. In the Northern Rivers, even 100 properties per year or 25 properties per electorate would make a huge difference. Particularly if they were available as transitional properties in the homelessness space. That investment doesn't need to be big bang, short-term investments with large numbers on them. What we need is sustained investment that supports an affordable and social housing industry over a long timeframe and that's a 10-year timeframe.

It's also vital that new social housing investment is targeted to areas with demonstrated high need and in that way you'll avoid the absolute failure of previous rounds of SAHF, the Social and Affordable Housing Fund, or even the former federal National Rental Affordability Scheme, where funding went into areas where they could get lots of houses built fast, rather than the areas where they're needed or areas like regional New South Wales where you don't have a large-scale construction industry that can just get going really quickly. Targets are vital. Without targets, government plans, strategies, social housing strategies are nothing more than glossy marketing brochures that avoid the issue of needing real action and resources to address this.

It's also important to allow for smaller projects because, as I said, you cannot get the scale in regional areas that you can in metro areas. We also need to look at the planning system, inclusionary zoning and, indeed, some of the measures that have been advocated around 'use it or lose it' if you have zoning approvals, to avoid land banking. Something government could do, the state government could do right now, is look at land tax reforms. You could provide a rebate for properties leased to community housing organisations or significantly below market. In Byron Bay, that would be a saving of hundreds of dollars a week of rent and that's something government could do. You could do it by regulation, I suspect. You don't even need to pass an Act. I think, also, look at creating a substantial housing innovation fund to open up the types of models of housing that could be supported through the social housing system. A large fund. Not just a couple of pilot opportunities, but important ones, supported by reform to the planning laws.

In Lismore, for example, we've been working for years just to build 12 tiny homes on an 800 square metre block, where once there was a single house. Some of them are fully disability accessible, some of them are loft apartments. It's taken a lot of work to get that. The affordable housing SEPP rules around boarding houses haven't helped. Again, government can do that through regulation, you don't need to pass legislation. Also look at co-investment. I did notice Rose flagged that the Churches Housing sector is interested in that and I think other land holders would be as well. I know, for example, that the Catholic diocese of Lismore, which covers the entire North Coast from Port Macquarie north, has put a proposal into government for co-investment on land held by the church and I think they'd be delighted to hear a return.

The co-investment models essentially provide support for some of the development cost and all of us would be interested in models like this, in return for the housing that's produced being available as social housing for a period of time, say 10 years or more. I think we need more funding for homelessness support and it should

be allocated according to need. Not saying take funding from some areas and put it to areas with higher need. I think it's supplementary homelessness funding so that you can actually achieve the government target of halving rough sleeping. As I said, the number of rough sleepers in Byron Bay alone are greater than the number of rough sleepers in Melbourne. In the city of Melbourne.

We haven't said much about meanwhile use because what we need are permanent solutions. Often it's really expensive to get, say, an empty hospital and say, let's refit that and use that for a few years to house people. Again, if I use the most expensive housing market in the country, Byron, we're working with Byron Council on redevelopment of the old Byron Hospital site and council have also been given the Mullumbimby Hospital. It has been said, can't we just house people in those two sites right away? The answer is, no you can't. They are in terrible condition. They're contaminated. The air conditioning plant has completely rusted out. They need millions of dollars of remediation. I think it would be better to look at what we do to actually have longer-term, to just look at the longer-term solution. There isn't a silver bullet, necessarily, in meanwhile use.

In our submission we talked about Doreen, an 80 year old woman who had a no-grounds eviction shortly after experiencing a stroke and was looking at living in a tent. In her case we were able to assist her to find a home but the reality, as you heard from Rose, is all too often a tent is the only option for families, older people and people with health issues. The problem that we now have with the state opening up is that tent sites are now fully booked over summer so people are being evicted from tent sites. That's a unique situation and I guess it highlights what can be done. I think though, in conclusion, the problem is difficult but solutions are there. I think it's just agreeing to invest. It doesn't have to be massive, upfront investment. It just needs to be investment sustained over time.

It's not about changing the overall property market. We're not trying to diminish the gains of hardworking homeowners. What we want to do is to create a relatively small but viable segment of affordable and social housing that helps people on lower incomes to take control of their lives. To live well and to contribute back to a socially rich and diverse, harmonious community. Thank you.

The CHAIR: Thank you. With the 2021-22 New South Wales State Budget, \$1.2 billion was dedicated to social housing and homelessness programs, \$730 million of which is actually to build and support secure and affordable housing for people on low incomes. My question here is for Craig, 30 per cent of that has been dedicated to the regions. What is your suggestion in regards to servicing youth, which you feel are quite vulnerable in the regions where you are? How we could perhaps direct some of that, targeted to youth?

Mr LYONS: Yes. I guess the most urgent need is in wrap-around services that are going to enable young people to be able to sustain tenancies as well as in additional social housing stock. For instance at the moment we're currently developing an apartment complex in Warilla that's 20 units of social housing for young people. The crucial difference, as opposed to general social housing, is that it's co-located with support services, case management, referrals, health services, employment, education and training, soft-skills around tenancy management and that sort of thing. What that allows is young people to be graduated out of social housing and to have successful housing careers. What often happens for youth, if they are able to access a property at a young age and often unprepared for the realities of the often quite exploitative private housing market, is that they find themselves wheeled before the Tribunal and evicted and cycling back through homelessness services. So it's really important to prevent that by creating a circumstance or a situation where people are given the support to sustain tenancies in a longer term fashion.

The CHAIR: Thank you Craig. Does anyone else have any questions for any of the witnesses this morning?

Mr CLANCY: Chair, please.

The CHAIR: Oh sorry Justin, yes.

Mr CLANCY: Chair. Firstly, thank you to the three of you for being with us today and to your organisations. My question is to Craig. Craig, I'm just interested, in your introductory comments you mentioned the 70,000 vacant dwellings across the state. Firstly, I'm just interested, I suppose just for you to give me a little bit of clarity around that. Is that 70,000 dwellings that are—some of them are taken up in short-term rental accommodation or are those that are completely vacant? Just a bit of background as to where your dataset is from. But then, in exploring that, are there ways, solutions in terms of tapping into that level of vacant dwellings? Thank you.

Mr LYONS: Yes, thanks for the question. In terms of where the number has come from, it was based as I understand it, and I'm happy to provide further clarification at a later stage, but it's based on the amount of properties that are vacant on Census. Sorry, I'll probably just have to go back and look at my notes and refer to it and provide...

Mr CLANCY: Sure.

Mr LYONS: ...more clarification on it. But in terms of where—options for identifying what can be done with vacant properties, I think Tony has referred to it, to a couple of options. Sort of 'use it or lose it' type regulations and rebates and those sorts of things. It's not really an area of expertise that we have in managing vacant property but there are options out there.

Mr CLANCY: Craig, thank you. Given that, I might open that up then to Tony and Rose, if they want to make any further comment to that, please. Sorry Rose, you're on mute there.

Ms THOMSON: Oh, sorry, there we go. I was just saying, Tony, do you mind if I go first? In our submission from Churches Housing, Justin and Panel, we put a significant reference in there to the way the City of Vancouver and indeed the BC has had a land tax there for vacant housing. I think what's critical here is, one, it addresses the issue of foreign ownership and multiple housing owned by the local yokels that just sit there vacant except for their summer holidays and many of them do not, in respect of areas like Byron Bay, they wouldn't use them as Airbnbs. They're satisfactorily positioned financially to just allow them to sit vacant. Okay, they might have a right to do that if they have worked hard and bought these homes, but the government can double down on that with not just a land tax but, indeed, a direct vacancy tax. The figures for that, of revenue for Vancouver City in a couple of years, was millions and millions of dollars which went straight into their social housing fund. I really do believe that when it's worked well in a region, that we can utilise those learnings and do something speedily and effectively.

Also, way back in 2018 now, post-pandemic Ernst & Young did a great report on unlocking hidden capacity in Sydney's houses. I don't know if you read it at the time, Justin, but one of the things they did was measure the number of bedrooms that are vacant, and at the time it was 900,000 bedrooms. So they took a conservative approach and said even 600,000, the use of redistribution. Of considering how the government might requisition back in a similar model of perhaps infrastructure acquisition of homes. Repositioning them in appropriate housing to unlock those bedrooms. Then they went further, when you talk about innovation to address some of these problems. They looked at the fact that we need to ask better questions sometimes and we're living in an age where the use of models that allow for sharing of assets, to subscribing to assets. We've got all of these platforms, I mean you can look at GoGet for the use of cars and Spotify to rent music and Blockchain.

The technology is there and if there's short-term need that is just crisis, there's opportunities at that level. But these reports get written and nothing seems to emerge from them. One of the things I'd love to see from this inquiry is, and I think Tony referenced, for the need for action. Sometimes it's taking what is actually there and building it out to actual activity. Certainly in the regions, when you talk about—and even in the city, there's land sitting around that—some parks are underused because the demographics have shifted. There's no way we couldn't utilise that speedily and effectively. In fact, with the use of small—the tiny homes or the shipping containers, we could actually respond in the area to frontline workers being where they needed to be at different times if we looked at some of these innovations.

But in respect of the actual tax issue, I think that to support our youth, the whole regional situation, the lining up of professionals for food in Parramatta, et cetera, I think if we started to just look at some of the taxing issues and the issues of some of the expediting the zoning issues at the local level. Government probably needs to come into that and actually require some changes and speedy responses. The timelines are awful, even just for a DA to do something different, they can argue for—we had a situation with Anglicare in Blacktown that they argued. It had to go to mediation and it was approved, but it took a whole year in mediation to actually get a building up that was going to offer something like 250 homes. We have to look at all of these issues. There's one issue, I suppose, that Craig spoke to so beautifully about responding speedily and wrapping around the youth. But there's the other issues in the area of actually making decisions. Tony referenced to this, there's so much research that is available for the government to make decisions and say, okay, we're going to pilot these programs, these technologies, and get the infrastructure side of social and affordable housing happening as well as the quick response matters.

Because we need—I think we're going to have to have—the feedback from our members tells me we need a variety of multi-level responses to the housing issues. It's not just camped in social housing, it's not just camped in the issues of affordable housing. We need a multi-tier response and I think much of the research that's already been delivered can help government launch these platforms. It shouldn't lurch from domestic violence to youth needs. They remain, always. They have spikes because of different issues like the pandemic, but they'll be with us always and we need to keep responding to this. The critical factor underlying all of this is stopping the downward trajectory into poverty and actually being able to lead them towards a better lifestyle and outcomes. Sorry if I sounded a bit passionate about that.

Mr CLANCY: Very good. Thank you Rose.

The CHAIR: No, that's good. That's fine. Jenny has a question.

Mr DAVIES: I just wanted to add two things, just on the question. I know from talking to my local

members, it doesn't matter what their political affiliation is, they're deeply concerned about this. Their fundamental frustration is the amount of development approved land in places like Tweed, Ballina, where the landholders just won't release it. That's a fundamental supply constraint. I think if people are land banking for a long period of time, and I mean decades, then there needs to be something in place to provide an incentive to develop. The approval and council process is an issue. For our little development of a dozen tiny homes, probably six or seven months to get it through council. It just shouldn't have taken that long.

Mr HARRIS: Tony, sorry, can I just jump in there. The timeframe is certainly an issue for approvals. What's the cost? So there's a cost to getting these approvals in reports and things as well.

Mr DAVIES: Yes, look, I mean there are a few things. There's the outgoings, which I can't give you an accurate figure, but I think it's around \$50,000 or so, perhaps more. But there's also the opportunity costs. We're holding the land, we're paying for the land, we've got staff working on it, we've got builders and we've got the delay. I mean, these houses, I think we've got roofs on six of them. The walls of another two were up on the weekend. People should be living in them now. That was our goal, to have people living in them by now. I guess anything that can be done to expedite it. Some of the rules around the planning that the affordable housing SEPP have made it difficult for us. It's got to be—for that SEPP to come into being you need to be near seven day a week transport. In regional areas you don't get seven day a week public transport. The buses don't run on the weekend. It needed to be near a shopping centre. This was near a shopping centre but for some reason the zoning was wrong. It's just little quirks that make it really difficult.

The CHAIR: Craig wanted to say something to that question.

Mr LYONS: To add to what Tony said. There does need to be some work, I think, in reducing the administrative burden of smaller agencies like ours who are trying to undertake development activity. We have a track record of delivering social housing for young people but when we're doing things like applying for DAs or even for funding applications, we're asked to provide increasing amounts of really complex information for funding applications and development applications, many of which require hiring of external consultants. There's an increasing expectation from funders that projects are shovel-ready, which requires a significant investment in pre-planning and gaining approvals for projects without any certainty that those projects will be funded. Additionally, I guess, relating to the issue of land, certain aspects of social housing delivery like land purchases aren't eligible under many grant schemes, so that's something that definitely constrains us when we're going out to try and develop housing for young people.

The CHAIR: Jenny, I believe you had a question.

Ms LEONG: Yes, thank you very much, Chair, and thank you all so much for your submissions and for what you're saying. I just want to really acknowledge, Tony, what you have said. The question I was going to ask, which was about the fact that we've been hearing about meanwhile use as some new, whizzbang solution. But actually we need urgent action on what could the government do right now to provide longer, sustainable options. It's really great you all covered that in your opening remarks. One of the things I just wanted to touch on was specifically around the idea that comes out, Rose, in your submission around the need to have adequate data. Because of the fact that the government has set as a priority looking at rough sleeping, which we know is something in the order of 10 per cent of the actual people suffering homelessness in the state.

I wondered if you could talk a little bit about what you would see as the recommendations that this Committee could make to set up a similar level of the Eviction Lab kind of approach to big data, to be able to look at the scale and scope of how significant this problem is. Recognising Tony's comments about the need for there to be real targets. Obviously we need to have both sides of that to be able to set the targets to manage. Then just the other question I was going to put to all of you was to say, in addition to anything—Tony, feel free to add more—but in addition to Tony's comments about the urgent action that's needed now and the solutions already being there in terms of the kinds of things that need to be done. Not needing more inquiries or more buzz words like meanwhile use as a way to solve the crisis, we just need more homes. Is there anything Rose or Craig, or feel free to jump in again Tony, that you think the government could be doing right now in terms of projects that would actually address the housing shortage? So if we do see a move to these meanwhile use options, that when the people's meanwhile use has ended they have somewhere to live beyond that.

Ms THOMSON: Can I speak to the data issue first. I think we have a number of universities in our state that are working on levels of data but when it comes to the homelessness data, we're missing so much. Doing street counts is valuable but it's missing all of the women on a girlfriend's sofa with a couple of kids on the floor. It's missing all of the different levels of homelessness that exist and it allows it to be missed as a critical factor. Matthew, over in the Eviction Lab, he started with eviction data across it, but he's working on a national model. I think certainly if we can't at least get to a national model, we need to pull together the different centres and research and housing research organisations to look at a combined data set. To look at how they can work with Census data to bring in the national level of bigger data.

But if I was you, Jenny, I'd be getting someone like Matthew out here from Stanford to sit down with the group of people and I'd be very willing to help draw that together, and have him speak to both the university and research sector with the key housing bureaucrats and MPs that have a mission in that regard. Particularly at the local level where they're sitting in regional spaces or they've got significant youth issues. It's about bringing it together and getting the best model, so I'd be getting him out here. He's an eviction expert. He started with evictions and then it led into uncovering all of the layers of homelessness that are not currently even being measured in our state. You've got to remember that it's hard to measure because some of our agencies are small. I came from 16 years in the university sector and I've come into this role to give back a little bit and I've got about 1.6 staff here.

To accelerate what could be done is missing. I think my colleagues who are on the frontline—I've got things that our members have said to me but it's anecdotal. So maybe Craig would be better to speak to quick housing options. I do think there's some programs that are out there where they're putting a young person to live with an older person. I can't remember the names of some of them, we probably captured them. I think if we accelerate some of this type of quick response. I do believe that any housing organisation that's able to put together small homes or mobile homes on a land piece, like Tony referenced to, should be able to come somewhere in government and have it just ticked off. We've got to just move outside. I can tell you a personal story where I and my sons decided we'd do some affordable housing in Newcastle. We bought one block of land on a big block, one house. We went for six villas for approval that we were just going to sell off as affordable units. It took us one year and one month to get DA approval at a cost of \$100,000 which automatically starts pushing up—and Newcastle is a city committed to housing.

But it pushed up the rate that we had to recover from our project. We had to add that into the price and so it starts taking away the affordability of the very commitment. I'm sure there's goodhearted citizens across our state trying to do small things that are being just—it gets too hard. It really does. So when you accelerate that to the organisation level on a day-to-day basis, my Anglicare reference earlier, what Craig's encountering every day. I think that we could requisition some parks, we could get small houses on there, they can be removed once the long-term housing goes up. But there'd have to be a commitment to that otherwise you actually create more insecurity by just doing short-term options.

Ms LEONG: Thanks so much for that Rose. Thank you.

The CHAIR: Craig, did you want to speak to that?

Mr LYONS: Yes, I just want to concur with Rose in terms of data. Particularly from a youth perspective, the data that is collected doesn't often deal with the scope of the problem with youth homelessness. Young people often couch surf and so they're not counted in rough sleepers. The other thing I wanted to mention is that there has been a federal inquiry into homelessness recently that published a report with a number of recommendations. The first of which was to look into and investigate the current definitions that we use for homelessness and they're looking very closely at the issue of overcrowding and whether it should be included as part of homelessness data. We would argue that it very much should be included as a part of homelessness data because most young people that present at our services are coming not from rough sleeping but from a situation where they're living in severely overcrowded dwellings.

Additionally, in terms of data, this is not an area of our expertise by any stretch but I just wanted to refer to, in terms of eviction data, there is a project in the United States based in San Francisco called the Anti-Eviction Mapping Project which is able to track evictions by type, going back a number of years. They've produced a series of very robust maps which are able to really zone in on areas of concern in regards to eviction and displacement in San Francisco, which is a very rapidly gentrifying city and has very serious housing issues, probably in a similar manner to many regional areas and Sydney at the moment. In terms of models that I think could be implemented now, I think our experience has shown that market-based models have proven difficult in terms of us going out and having subsidised housing in the private market, for instance, because we're often competing with low income tenants and other agencies and community housing providers.

The research has shown, research from places like AHURI, City Futures Research Centre and others, that the best way to invest in social and affordable housing is through capital grants to assist with construction and operating subsidies to assist with the ongoing operation of that social housing. It provides the highest cost-benefit ratio out of any model of social housing provision and that's the model of which we're most supportive in an ongoing way.

Mr DAVIES: I'd like to add. Firstly, look, definitely more data but please do not use the need for data as a reason not to act. There is sufficient data that demonstrates the need to act. It's really important we don't decide that the easiest thing as a government is to fund the data collection or a research project. Needed, absolutely, particularly into causes and best models, but there's certainly enough. The other thing I'd say is that the market-based models, so these are subsidies in the private rental market for the housing of the people we support like Rent Choice Youth, Start Safely, programs like that. They are really good conceptually but in a rental market where you have vacancies that are under one per cent, and in our case closer to zero percent than one per cent, they just

don't work.

What Craig said is absolutely right. We find that we're all competing with each other for these houses, let alone with someone who isn't in support but on a low income. Don't get rid of them but don't think that that's the solution because there's no rental stock, that's the issue. I think temporary accommodation, tiny houses, mobile houses, it's great but there are some practicalities. You need civil engineering works. You need sewer, hot water and power connections, things like that. We can't have a caravan in every backyard, that creates a whole range of other problems. But you certainly can use the van park infrastructure. One of the issues we had was that there aren't strong tenancy protections for people in the van park so I think government could quite easily headlease a whole bunch of cabins or vans in those van parks or make sites available as a temporary measure for us to house and accommodate people.

It's not ideal, but it's better than tents. As I say, we do have to resort to tents. That is something that could be done. At the moment, if people get evicted they're not able to stay for a long period of time, there's all sorts of issues there. But if you do that you can't just—and this goes back to Craig's point. You can't just fund the accommodation, you've got to fund the support. Particularly in van park environments. You might have families who've got children, they need to use amenities blocks. There's some real risks there to think about. But if you have appropriate supports and appropriate guidelines and safeguards in place, that is a measure that could be taken.

Ms THOMSON: Could I add, Jenny, I don't know whether you've heard of the Foyer model? F-O-Y...

Ms LEONG: Yes, it's in—the new one is in the electorate of Newtown. But just to say that we have also had other submissions that have talked about the Youth Foyer model as a really strong model.

Ms THOMSON: Yes. When you talk about speedy implementation and just in respect of youth in particular, the fact that you could quite readily, probably, acquisition some commercial buildings that could be quickly converted to shared space kitchens and what have you with single unit sleeping spaces. I'd probably be working with that and go down and chat with them, see how it's working for them and see how quickly you could acquisition buildings that would be converted speedily.

Ms LEONG: If I was the Minister for Housing I would have already been trying to put these in. Sadly I don't have—control the purse strings to make these decisions, but I'm trying hard though.

Ms THOMSON: Well, drag her down there, Jenny.

Ms LEONG: They go for the openings and the ribbon cutting, they just don't fund them.

Ms THOMSON: I know.

Ms LEONG: They sell them off all around.

Ms THOMSON: It's a challenge.

The CHAIR: Okay, any other questions? Okay. Well, look, thank you for joining us all today. We appreciate your time and your submissions and thanks for being a part of the inquiry.

Ms THOMSON: Thank you for your time.

Mr LYONS: Thanks very much.

Ms LEONG: Thank you all so much.

Ms THOMSON: If we can help further, just let me know.

Ms LEONG: Thank you.

Ms DOYLE: Thanks for your work everyone.

Mr DAVIES: Thank you.

(The witnesses withdrew.)

(Short adjournment)

SALLY GRIMSLEY-BALLARD, General Manager, Domestic Violence Service Management, affirmed and examined before the Committee via videoconference

LIVIA STANTON, Policy and Advocacy Officer, Domestic Violence NSW, affirmed and examined before the Committee via videoconference

The CHAIR: Do either of you have any questions about today's hearing at all? No? Okay, great and would you like to make an opening statement, Olivia?

Ms STANTON: Yes. Thank you. So I am the Policy and Advocacy Officer at Domestic Violence New South Wales, which is the peak body for specialist domestic and family violence services. We represent over 120 members, more than 50 of which are specialist homelessness services. Thank you for giving me the opportunity to appear as a witness today on this important issue. I would like to acknowledge the Traditional Owners of the land which I am on today, the Gadigal people of the Eora Nation and I pay my respects to Elders past, present and future.

Domestic and family violence is the leading cause of homelessness for women and children. It is the main reason they seek support for homelessness services but only three per cent get the long-term housing they need. In Australia, almost 8000 women a year return to perpetrators because they have nowhere affordable to live. Over 9000 women become homeless because of domestic and family violence. Meanwhile use accommodation cannot compensate for the absence of affordable long-term housing. It is generally not fit for the needs of women and children, having been repurposed and often with shared kitchen and bathroom facilities. Such communal living can actually cause further distress for women and children experiencing trauma. A recent example of this type of accommodation is a six month pop-up safe house initiative in 2020 by children's charity, Royal Far West, who partnered with Women and Children First to provide accommodation and case management for around 100 women and children who were facing homelessness or had experienced domestic and family violence.

So Drummond House in Manly was repurposed into a facility with 35 private rooms with communal kitchens and communal lounge/dining areas. The location, whilst empty, was not suitable for many of the residents as there were insufficient supports. While the initiative must be recognised for including women on temporary visas who are not afforded the same rights to social welfare and housing as permanent residents, unfortunately the exit pathways for women and children were very limited. The program moved 80 per cent of clients into housing situations which were only guaranteed for the next six months with only 50 per cent still in the same accommodation today. Moving from short-term accommodation into permanent housing is difficult and often unachievable for families experiencing violence.

A safe home helps victim survivors heal, contribute more to the economy and reduces the burden on our social systems. The New South Wales Government urgently needs to invest in social housing to support women and children experiencing homelessness because of domestic and family violence. The appeal of meanwhile use accommodation is clear. It does not cost the Government anything and it can be packaged as the private sector investing in local community. However, the long-term impact is the Government shifting responsibility for social housing to the private sector. The only solution is investment in social housing.

The New South Wales Government must deliver 5000 social housing properties every year for the next decade. The Government received a higher than expected return on investment for social housing stock, which could be invested back into the housing portfolio to meet increasing demand. In the wake of the pandemic, social housing is vital infrastructure for New South Wales' economic security with proven capacity to create new jobs, kickstart the economy and address current social housing shortfall and, most importantly, end the cycle of homelessness for our most vulnerable. Thank you.

The CHAIR: Thank you. Sally, would you like to make an opening statement? Sally, you are on mute.

Ms GRIMSLEY-BALLARD: Is it off now? Yes?

The CHAIR: Yes, that is it.

Ms GRIMSLEY-BALLARD: Thank you.

The CHAIR: That is okay.

Ms GRIMSLEY-BALLARD: So acknowledging I am speaking to you from beautiful Gadigal country and paying my respects. So thank you for the invitation to hear from DVSM. We are a medium-sized service with an incredible team of domestic violence workers. We absolutely support the list of priorities DV New South Wales have presented. We experience the impact of limited housing stock in Sydney and remote regional New South Wales on a daily basis. Creating adequate stable and culturally appropriate access to short-, medium- and long-term accommodation for women escaping domestic violence is going to remain a priority while DV is not decreasing.

For this Committee, two key areas we see quick wins for, include a review to improve current temporary accommodation systems, including extensions and repairs on properties and an audit of empty properties across New South Wales. In Sydney, 95 per cent of our clients are seeking stable accommodation. It is a cause of great stress to a woman who has just fled DV, navigating safe — seeking safe housing, most commonly with a limited income or zero income for temporary visa holders. The current systems often exacerbate the challenges a woman and her children are facing and are hard to navigate and are inefficient.

Supporting women experiencing DV with an adequate initial stay in temporary accommodation will not significantly increase costs as currently, there is high cost in resourcing the negotiations. We recently supported a woman and her three children. Despite advocating for an immediate extension of her temporary accommodation, the family had to checkout at 10 a.m. Our team spent all day, back and forth with Housing until late in the afternoon

when an extension was finally granted at the same motel. The family ended up wandering around a shopping centre for hours with nowhere to sit or rest during the pandemic measures. The woman was extremely distressed by the afternoon.

We have noted vacant furnished properties in Wilcannia. There are teacher's and police accommodation units that we are aware of have been empty for months at a time. There are known position intake times for each of those roles. We are recommending if properties remain available, arrangements are in place to promptly facilitate short-term leases with DV services or Community Housing. In our experience in Wilcannia, DV is exacerbated by the over-crowded homes so short leases will support families seeking space living apart. I note that there is not one other house to rent in Wilcannia once the safe house and the motel are full. A woman and her children fleeing DV need dignity and choices, including housing options, financial support and minimising the number of times they move. Prioritising stable accommodation leads to significantly better outcomes for women where they can raise their children, work, study and contribute to their communities. Thank you.

The CHAIR: Thank you. Just to let you know, too, I am Wendy Lindsay, the state member for East Hills, the Chair of the Committee and joining us via Webex is Justin Clancy, the member for Albury and Jenny Leong, the member for Newtown and Trish Doyle, the member for Blue Mountains. So — oh and Melanie Gibbons has just tuned in as well from — the member for Holsworthy. So thank you, ladies, again, for joining us this afternoon and I will open it up to questions for any of you coming in via Webex, if you would like to ask anything? Yes, Jenny?

Ms JENNY LEONG: Thanks so much, Chair and thank you Livia and Sally, for your opening remarks and for the submission that you have made and the calls that you are making around that. My question, given the concerns that both of you have raised around issues of temporary accommodation, I have real concerns about the fact that meanwhile use is being used as a new seemingly whizzbang solution but is that yet another band-aid to address or the failures to supply adequate long-term safe and secure affordable housing?

If the Government was to go down this path with a meanwhile use model or initiative, obviously at some point there is going to be an exit out of that meanwhile use into the need for longer-term accommodation. You have both got experience in this space because of the issues around refuges and temporary accommodation options and transitional housing. What do you think the Government could be urgently doing and the Committee could be urgently recommending the Government do now to ensure that the exit pathways are there when this meanwhile use then ends and people need to find additional places to be able to live? What are the things that you've been calling for and what are the quick wins, if you like, or the big investments that are needed to be able to deliver on that longer term safe, secure and affordable housing?

Ms STANTON: Thanks, Jenny, for that question. I think you are absolutely right, there are great concerns with meanwhile use accommodation if it is to become something that the Government is reliant on. Particularly for women and children who are — who have experienced violence. So in terms of those exit paths from meanwhile use to more long-term sustainable accommodation, Domestic Violence New South Wales would suggest that the Government invest in social housing for specific marginalised communities, including young women. Including older women. Housing for — that is suitable for families and for children. Suitable for people with disabilities and also including Aboriginal-owned housing.

I know this is not an immediate. It is not something that can happen overnight. I think in the shorter term, the Government needs to immediately guarantee housing for women and children who are in this temporary accommodation, including women on temporary visas, to make sure that they are not left homeless at the end of a stay. One of the things that the Government could do, would be to conduct an audit across New South Wales, to identify and acquire accommodation that may be appropriate for repurposing, in consultation with community housing services, domestic violence services and peak bodies. So we would really be advocating for close consultation through that process. Thank you.

The CHAIR: Thank you.

Ms JENNY LEONG: Thank you. Did you want to respond as well, Sally?

Ms GRIMSLEY-BALLARD: Yes, so absolutely supporting everything Livia says and we advocate for all those pathways. Some extra things that we have been sort of considering are things like — I think they were in the equity economics papers. They are definitely in Constellation Project. Talk about them, Homeless New South Wales, DV New South Wales — but tax concessions. Encouraging people to contribute to more building. All those sorts of things. I think that there is a real opportunity to be harnessing the local government as well as state government, working together to be building those properties and setting targets around those social builds.

I think there is a community awareness-raising element that we could do as well in that I think there is still stigma around social housing and there does not need to be — we are all part of this community. We are all a really important part of the community so I think local and New South Wales Government have got some work to do there as well as Federal Government. I also, on that, harnessing communities that have got investment properties that are prepared to have families in there. You know, it is a win-win. I think — I just cannot think of anyone that I know

that would say no to a family needing a house, a long-term, stable house, that is experiencing domestic and family violence if they could support it. If they knew.

So we are continuing to develop our relationships with real estate agents and help them understand that we are all part of the community and I see that that is just something that we all could be part of, encouraging and supporting and whether it is tax concessions or incentives or — but when I hear about — I often hear real estates that when a property owner finds out, they sometimes either do not charge for the first month of rent or they do not — they can lower the prices. All those sorts of things. So it is a community — it is all of our problem and it is all of our solution. So I think there are some options and opportunities there. Thank you.

The CHAIR: Could I just ask...

Ms JENNY LEONG: Thank you so much both of you.

The CHAIR: Sorry, Jenny. Could I just ask you both what your thoughts are on the viability of using relocatable or tiny homes as a solution to crisis and short-term accommodation until the investment the Government has committed to building new social housing as an interim? Would that work in your community, Sally?

Ms GRIMSLEY-BALLARD: It would. It is definitely something we are exploring for Wilcannia. So anyone who has watched any news lately knows that it has been quite a challenging six months and so we definitely, it is something we have been exploring for some time. I think the Government really needs to invest in those initiatives though and we are happy to help with administering the leases and all those sorts of things but where there is land, I mean we have been pricing them. You know, you can get a decent house for 60-grand. Like those tiny homes. I am sure that there is the whole range of pricing there. Obviously you have got to have your plumbing and your infrastructure but even after the pandemic and mobile homes being needed to take — be taken into Wilcannia, I actually explored it with a colleague recently for the Blue Mountains. What do you do if you need to de-concentrate a refuge because of COVID? How do we get quick wins? Yes, these sorts of things we definitely have entertained. So thank you.

The CHAIR: Livia, would you like to add to that at all?

Ms STANTON: I think perhaps as a last resort tiny homes could be considered but I think there are significant concerns there in terms of the — whether or not they would be trauma informed for women and children who have experienced violence. Being so small, we would question whether they really have the space to recover. Whether they are purpose built as well. Whether they are — I think it is good because they are small and that would make them sustainable, I guess in the long-term, but I think it is something I would need to see more detail on, to really be able to make an informed decision as to whether it is something that Domestic Violence New South Wales would recommend.

The CHAIR: Trish, did you want to ask a question?

Ms TRISH DOYLE: Yes, I do. First I just want to say thank you so much, Sally and Livia for the work you do in a very tough space and if you would not mind, on behalf of our Committee and the work we are doing here, thanking your teams for the work they do day in, day out? Some of the issues that you have spoken to today, my colleague Justin and I have recently heard quite a bit about. We both sat as members on the Joint Select Committee on Coercive Control, so well aware that this particular cohort of people have very particular needs.

I wanted to just ask you both about different models that you would advocate for. There are several different sorts of models that take into account the issues of being trauma-informed, catering for bigger families. You know, a sort of gated community type of setup as well in terms of who can access sites. Sally, you would know, I think particularly the solution some years ago that Government came up with in terms of emergency and transitional housing when the refuge was full, was to pack families into the G'Day Motel, sandwiched between the highway and the railway line. Just not at all appropriate. So we have heard quite a bit about Housing First models, we have heard different variations of that. What is something that you think could work quickly and going to my colleague Jenny's point, is not just something that is very short-term but something looking to a longer-term, more sustainable solution?

Ms GRIMSLEY-BALLARD: Do you want me to jump in first, Livia?

Ms STANTON: Yes.

Ms GRIMSLEY-BALLARD: Look, Trish, I might actually have to take that one on a little notice — I'd like to have a bit more of a think about it but just really quick things for me are really practical. It has to be self-contained. They have to have kitchen facilities. It is just — you know, I hear about accommodation that does not even have a microwave in it and babies are there. I am like, okay, so how do you — formula, all that kind of — just impossible. So appropriate needs. Like, so kitchen, laundry, all those sorts of things. We do not advocate for shared spaces in that it is just — it is not conducive to healing and moving forward. Infrastructure and supports around you and I see lots of positives in the core and cluster models for refuge in the future but it needs to be self-contained and women need to be able to have their own space. So they are key things for us.

As I have said before, I think it needs to be in community. It should not just be in a DV gated community because then you have got lots of people all in trauma and it can be — as we know in a refuge, it can be very tricky and we are very careful about how do we think a person will fit in with another family? All those sorts of things as we place people. So they are just some immediate considerations but I will definitely have a think a bit more about your question and come back to you, if you are interested. Thank you.

Ms STANTON: Yes, I would echo what Sally has said here in that any accommodation really does need to be needs-based. It does need to be self-contained. I think it is really important that it does fit in with the rest of the community so that you do not just have pockets of isolation. Pockets of trauma. Pockets of poverty. There does need to be wrap-around support services available nearby. There needs to be great infrastructure, schools, childcare. Playgrounds. All of that. The core and cluster model is something that we would definitely support for refuge accommodation and something that we are looking into with the new announcement of the 75 refuges. Now, that is obviously a short-term sort of solution but if you can visualise that core and cluster model and take that into social housing whereby you still have those access to legal services, counselling services, all of the appropriate services within a close proximity as well as being — housing that is environmentally sustainable. That is not freezing in the winter, that is not boiling hot in the summer. That is liveable. That is safe. Yes, there is — I mean the list goes on, I think but again, that is something that I could — I can take on notice as well and have a chat to our team about for more detailed recommendations around models.

Ms TRISH DOYLE: Well if there are any particular models that you think — or you have heard worked. So like the Muslim Women's Association, for example, talked about Linking Hearts and — in the Housing First model but particular to the needs of those in domestic violence situations or escaping and part of that healing process. Anything that you hear is — even if it is from overseas, would be useful. Thank you both so much.

Ms STANTON: Thanks, Trish.

The CHAIR: Can I just ask you, what do you think the different barriers are between urban and regional New South Wales? The main barriers?

Ms GRIMSLEY-BALLARD: I am having a moment with the unmute and mute. Okay, so I am just going to quickly add to that last question with Trish that just the large families we have to be considering our families are growing and particularly western Sydney but also regional New South Wales. They are big families and you have to have adequate space. It is okay for children to share bedrooms but there needs to be adequate space for the families.

Barriers, look, regional New South Wales, the infrastructure is not there. Wilcannia is a perfect case in point this year that they do not even have Woolies or Coles. A proper supermarket able to — so they have got a tiny little IGA and I know that is consistent in lots of remote New South Wales so you need — we need infrastructure. Adequate infrastructure to be able to move and move on. How — I mean, housing affordability in both Sydney and regional New South Wales has just become so prohibitive, it is not funny. You all know that. We all know it but it is — our team spends hours and I am, no joke, hours every day trying to advocate and find places for people that are appropriate and clean and safe. So yes, renting is just — I think it is equally challenging in both places but there is differences. So obviously in Sydney, we have got infrastructure and supports and even if you are travelling a little bit, it is usually — there is usually some form of public transport, et cetera. So in New South Wales, you need a car. Like regional New South Wales, you need a car. Fuel. Petrol. All those things add up very quickly. Yes, again, I am happy to add to this in — nothing else is coming to mind at the moment but there are numerous, numerous barriers that our families are challenged with on a daily basis. Yes.

The Chair: Okay, thank you, Sally. Are there any other questions at all from the Committee? Justin?

Mr JUSTIN CLANCY: Yes, thank you and firstly, Sally, thank you. I have just got a couple of different questions, please. One was around, Livia, I suppose right at the very start you were talking about [inaudible] the great demand there. We have got so many wonderful organisations across the state that all work in this space around providing accommodation and women's refuge but just from a data perspective, are we bringing — drawing that together in any one spot? Is there — do we — is there a way that we are capturing that so that we have got that overall view of how much demand there is? Then Sally, I would love to just return to your comment around the working with real estate agencies in terms of finding short-term accommodation. Is that again, I am probably anticipating that that is a sort of organic process that local organisations are working with local real estate agents or is there a way we can assist that in that regard? So thank you, just a couple of questions there. Thanks.

Ms STANTON: Sorry, Justin, was the question on data around need in certain areas? Or what was the...

Mr JUSTIN CLANCY: I suppose more about are we from a state perspective, are we really capturing the overall data? Like for example, I can have a sense of the demand, the need, in our local refuge here in Albury but is that getting presented and consolidated somewhere so that across the — somewhere within Government, they are getting a sense of what is happening across the state on any particular — and probably any real time data in this day and age so that we have got a real sense of demand across the state and across the state during various times of the year?

Ms STANTON: Look, Justin, I believe that data is definitely there in the form of the SHS data that is reported on quarterly. So the Specialist Homelessness Services, which provide that data to DCJ. So absolutely, I think the demand and the need is quite apparent. I do not think there is any question of misunderstandings of the data or the — of the crisis, basically, that we are in.

Mr JUSTIN CLANCY: Yes and I will just interrupt there, just for clarity. I am certainly not questioning the need, I am just wanting to make sure that Government is making sure that it is getting that overall picture in that regard, in as real time as possible so that we have got that sense of the data coming through. Sorry but yes, certainly not questioning the demand.

Ms STANTON: Yes, yes. You were right, I just think I needed clarification on that. So yes, I think the Government has that information available, absolutely.

Ms GRIMSLEY-BALLARD: Can I jump in and add to it? So definitely, we collect data as Livia said, on a daily basis. Clients coming in, all those sorts of things but I am not sure we are capturing how many people we are turning away. So I do not think that that is clearly captured in that if — so the way it happens at the moment is the Government service looks at an online form, sees whether there is a vacancy in our refuge or not. Sometimes they will ring as well just in hope because they are quite desperate as well and that they spend a lot of time hunting through who is available. All those sorts of things and so conversation ensues, all that sort of stuff and we might say no or we might say yes, actually someone has moved out this morning. Yes, we probably could place them tonight. Or can you get them in temporary accommodation tonight? We could get them into the refuge tomorrow.

But I am not — I do not think — I think we could do better with capturing how many people are being turned away on a daily basis. I do know of some services that are capturing it themselves and it is something I wish to explore but we have not been able to make happen this year. It has been a bit full on. Yes, so I think that there is merit in pushing for further data capture to really understand our issue. As Livia said, it is really clear in that there is nowhere for people to go so they are staying with perpetrators on a daily basis.

Regarding the real estate, I definitely — Homeless New South Wales did some work around this last year. I think maybe with DV New South Wales, Livia? I cannot remember exactly but there was some sort of support sheets provided to services and some overall thinking about how we approach real estate agencies. I cannot tell you whether they went to the real estate peaks and what they are in corporate. But there was a fair amount of work that was done after the last pandemic last year, because this has all been exacerbated, basically, since March last year. So I know that there is definitely some work there but I do think there is something in that whole community campaign that there is the bigger picture and then there is the targeting different areas of corporate, like the real estate agencies, which I think is an easy, quick win, though it will take time. Yes. Thank you.

Mr JUSTIN CLANCY: Thanks. Thanks, Sally. Thanks Livia. Just...

Ms STANTON: Can I...

Mr JUSTIN CLANCY: Sorry...

Ms STANTON: Sorry, can I just add further to the data question? As Sally was mentioning, that there are certain services that are capturing their own data on turn away rates. That is something that has been flagged to DV New South Wales around the reporting capability with SHS providers that it does not accurately capture the turn away data. So that is an issue and I believe that they are trying to rectify it in the upgrades for the software but it is not going to happen quickly. It is kind of a short — I mean, a long-term solution. I believe another thing that is not accurately captured in SHS data is with domestic violence, it is — it does not capture whether it is intimate partner or whether it is family violence. This is really crucial data for us to know what they have experienced so that we can adequately support these people and provide the right kind of housing solutions as well.

Mr JUSTIN CLANCY: Thanks, Livia. That is really good additional feedback too, in that regard. Just finally, Chair, if I may? I suppose one thing — and I have got to be careful, I know we are moving away a little bit from, say, the terms of this particular inquiry but one element and maybe Sally, particularly, for say, Wilcannia in that regard, but Staying Home Leaving Violence, is there anything on that particular program that is worth noting in terms of this particular inquiry at this point?

Ms GRIMSLEY-BALLARD: When it works, it is fantastic in that you know, women and their children — especially when there is children, should not be having to move and yes, it definitely — in preparation was thinking about the fact that maybe we should be building more single units for men but there is a bigger problem there. All that sort of stuff. So yes, Staying Home Leaving Violence works when it works and it is actually a very low cost way but it is very difficult to have a perpetrator — like if a perpetrator does not want to go, it is incredibly difficult and some safety cameras and an AVO are not keeping women safe.

Mr JUSTIN CLANCY: Thank you.

Ms GRIMSLEY-BALLARD: Yes, that is my — that is my opinion.

Ms STANTON: Can I just...

The CHAIR: Thank you and Justin, you just need to turn up your microphone if you need to ask another question. You were a bit soft there. We could hear you but with very intent ears. Jenny, you had a question?

Ms STANTON: Sorry, can I add just on Staying Home — sorry, just on Staying Home Leaving...

The CHAIR: No, you are all right. That's okay. Yes?

Ms STANTON: ...Violence, that there has been further funding announced, which is fantastic. However, our members are really concerned that the funding boost is going to be insufficient. That there is a huge volume of victim survivors who currently cannot access Staying Home Leaving Violence services and expansion of this program will really only just hit the waitlist in certain areas. It will not cover the additional geographies that need that support. So whilst they are going to add — I think it is five new locations across the state, which is fantastic, there are still many, many locations and a lot of those are in metro Sydney that still will not have that support because the additional funding will only capture the waitlist on those areas that are already servicing clients. So yes, it is not sufficient funding.

The CHAIR: Jenny, you had a question?

Ms JENNY LEONG: Yes, thank you, Chair. I just had another question I thought I would ask. We are talking about various types of what would be short-term or temporary crisis, transitional housing. Does the Government or does the sector have any requirements on what is best practice around the timing? Like I know there are pressures on there being only a certain amount of temporary accommodation that people are allowed to access but in terms of setting benchmarks to know how squashed the existing crisis refuge, temporary accommodation spaces are, do you have what you consider to be best practice in terms of how long someone should be in crisis accommodation moving into temporary or transitional accommodation before they are given permanent or a safe and secure long-term housing. Do you know of any requirements that the Government has in relation to those measures? Because one of the concerns that has been raised with meanwhile use is it needs to be at least a six to 12 month period to make it useful. My concern is, we will just see people being put into meanwhile use as the solution rather than it being seen as a transitional arrangement.

Ms GRIMSLEY-BALLARD: Livia, do you want to go first or do you want me to?

Ms STANTON: Yes, I will go. So I think—I mean we see crisis as really up to three months. So crisis refuge accommodation. Transitional really should be two years. So even that six to 12 months, that is not enough time for women and children who are in crisis to establish any kind of stability. To heal from the trauma. Six to 12 months is really just a blip on the radar so we would be looking at two years plus for transitional.

Ms GRIMSLEY-BALLARD: Yes and I definitely agree with that. Best practice for me is maximum two weeks in crisis. Just quick, in there while we negotiate long-term lease for someone or a medium to long-term lease. It is not realistic at the moment but the more times a person has to move, it is just exacerbating everything that they are doing. So —and the instability for children. We see it with women on temporary visas. We see it with really women —with women with really low incomes. You know, that they have to move schools, they have to —like, you know and it just exacerbates everything. So yes, best practice to me would be one to two weeks in crisis accommodation and then into something that is yes, around two years at least so that they have got that stability. Get back on their feet, work out what is the next steps in their lives and retraining or whatever that means education wise for themselves or working. Those sorts of things. Yes.

Ms JENNY LEONG: Thank you. I think it is really important to put that in perspectives because last — in the last session we had earlier, people were talking about the pressures on the transitional housing because there is no public housing waiting stock so then people are sitting in transitional housing for three, four years. Obviously that then means that the flow through of other people needing that does not work because of that backlog. So it is useful to get those timeframes on the record. Thank you.

The CHAIR: Thank you, ladies. Dugald Saunders, the member for Dubbo has also just joined us. Dugald, did you have any questions?

Mr DUGALD SAUNDERS: Look, not really. I think what you have said all makes perfect sense. Thanks, Sally and Livia. Thanks for being here.

The CHAIR: Thank you for joining us both, ladies. Is there anything else you would like to add before we move on to our next witness?

Ms GRIMSLEY-BALLARD: For me it is just — it is that I have said this — I said it in the Coercive Control, it is everybody needs to be part of this. I have got 20 years public sector myself, experience. We are all part of this situation, we are all part of the solution. We all need to be working together. The peaks have got great information there. Equity economics, the — there is so many great papers it is about moving this forward now and we — it is urgent. Absolutely urgent. Thank you. Thank you for your time.

The CHAIR: Thanks, Sally. Thank you.

Ms STANTON: Yes, I would agree. It is absolutely at crisis point. All of the evidence is there to support investing in social housing. How great it is for the economy. I think the pandemic has really shone a light on this as well and really amplified the voices so yes, now is the time to act to end homelessness. Thank you, everyone.

The CHAIR: Thank you. Well thank you, ladies. Thanks for joining us today and if you did want to send in anything further, could you please do so within the next week? Two weeks at the most. That would be much appreciated.

Ms GRIMSLEY-BALLARD: Thank you.

Ms JENNY LEONG: Thank you, both.

The CHAIR: Thanks a lot.

(The witnesses withdrew.)

(Short adjournment)

MARK DEGOTARDI, CEO, Community Housing Industry Association, affirmed and examined before the Committee via videoconference

The Chair: Thank you very much and did you have an opening statement that you would like to begin with?

Mr DEGOTARDI: Yes, thanks very much, I do and thanks to the Committee for their invitation to appear here today, I am joining you from Gadigal land and I would like to pay my respects to the Elders, past, present and emerging. I am the CEO of the Community Housing Industry Association in New South Wales, which represents a bit over 90 registered not-for-profit community housing providers including Homes North and the Housing Trust, which appeared before this inquiry earlier. Our members own or manage more than 50,000 properties across New South Wales and that includes one-third of all social housing properties. We do not just manage properties, we develop and own our own properties and since 2012, our members have built more than 4400 homes in New South Wales, contributing around \$1.5 billion to the State's economy. With targeted Federal and State Government assistance, we have the capacity to deliver thousands more properties, new homes, within the next couple of years. Developments that are ready to go right now.

Our members are active in the temporary accommodation space. In recent years, our members such as Bridge Housing, Link Wentworth Housing and My Foundations have built innovative partnerships with the not-for-profit and private sectors to deliver meanwhile use housing for hundreds of young people and older women. In the last fortnight, our other member, City West Housing, announced a new partnership with the City of Sydney, Women's Community Shelters and Scape to deliver 20 new units in repurposed student accommodation for women escaping domestic violence, a development that will be ready by year's end. But of course, meanwhile use is not a panacea for long-term housing shortages and there are some issues that need to be dealt with in terms of meanwhile use housing opportunities. Notably financial viability, planning consistent constraints and property suitability.

Temporary housing options though are critical and can provide a short-term housing solution for some of the estimated 37,000 people who are homeless in New South Wales on any given night but it is important that we remember they are temporary. There is more than 50,000 households waiting for social housing in New South Wales right now and New South Wales Treasury has estimated its own intergenerational report that the waiting list could grow by more than 68,000 households by 2060. We have to explore free accommodation options like meanwhile use but we cannot ignore the long-term structural under-investment in permanent social and affordable housing. We must develop temporary and permanent housing solutions together.

Of course, the community housing sector is an effective and capable partner with Government in delivering that permanent housing and we acknowledge and welcome the recently announced extension to the Community Housing Innovation Fund, which leverages the Community Housing Model to provide more homes than would be otherwise be possible if delivered by New South Wales Government alone. With the direct funding of a bit over \$100 million over four years, our members will build up to 500 new homes for people in greatest need. These funding commitments are obviously a positive start but it is clear for all of us that Government, community housing sector and the private sector have a long way to go to meet the State's housing affordability and supply challenges.

Community housing providers like my members need access to capital grants, government land and well-designed policy settings to kick start new shovel-ready projects. We have a significant opportunity to invest in housing as social infrastructure and create thousands of new jobs and build better homes and communities at the same time. I think we have a collective responsibility to do much more for those families at the epicentre of the

housing affordability crisis that no longer is a big city problem but affects communities across New South Wales. So thanks to the Chair and thanks to Committee members for the opportunity to be here today and of course I am more than happy to answer your questions.

The CHAIR: Thank you. I would just like to kick off by asking, what changes do you think could be made to planning policies to allow more innovative housing models as for meanwhile use to be implemented more easily?

Mr DEGOTARDI: In terms of — yes, in terms of meanwhile use, the critical thing about meanwhile use is that the property has to be suitable and it needs to be easily adaptable and the financial costs of doing that only stack up if the meanwhile use property is available for an appropriate period of time. It goes, therefore without saying, that if the planning proposals or planning policies in place or the local government consents are too unwieldy to gain, too costly to achieve or too lengthy in terms of their delivery, that cuts down the amount of time that the meanwhile use property is available.

As I think other people appearing before this inquiry would have made the point to you, it is really important that people in temporary or crisis accommodation have certainty. So the less time you have for a meanwhile use type property is not just critical for someone like a not-for-profit CHP in terms of the financial viability of that property. The shorter the time, the more difficult it is to make these things stack up but it also has an impact on the people that will be living in those properties. So it is really important that we get good cohesion and collaboration between State, local government and the private and public sector in bringing these properties to fruition.

The CHAIR: Thank you. Justin, did you have a question?

Mr JUSTIN CLANCY: Thanks, Chair and thanks, Mark, for the work that you do in your organisations, too.

The CHAIR: Sorry, Justin, you are quite soft. Can you just speak a little bit louder, please?

Mr JUSTIN CLANCY: Sorry, Mark. I don't know if you can hear me there?

The CHAIR: That is better.

Mr JUSTIN CLANCY: Thanks, Mark. A couple of times now you have touched on suitability and I think that is an important area to focus. Have you got thoughts around that? Like, should Government be — and what role for Government? Should it be placing regulation around suitability of meanwhile use accommodation or is that — how do we ensure that we are identifying suitable properties and utilising suitable properties in that regard?

Mr DEGOTARDI: Well look, it is really important not just to look at it from our perspective but particularly in terms of the tenants for those properties and I make that point really clearly. There are, for a range of reasons as you would have no doubt heard and seen during the pandemic, a range of properties that were perhaps built for something but have not been able to be used for that purpose or indeed were intended to be re-developed but for economic or other reasons, have not undergone that redevelopment. So it is sensible to say, well what else could we use for — those properties for in the short-term? But just because you have a vacant property does not mean that that is a suitable home for someone to live in and even if that is on a temporary basis, that home has to have adequate facilities for families and to cook, to live in, to access transport. So all of these things are really critical considerations.

So you should not apply to a meanwhile use property lower standards of living than you would perhaps in a general residential tenancy. There are some aspects of these properties that will not be like a standard three-bedroom house in the suburbs, of course. But it is really important that we treat these properties as longer-term tenancies for the people that live in them and so that means that they have adequate and suitable accommodations within those properties. It does mean that some properties that maybe have been built as hotels or other properties may just simply not be suitable. I believe one of our members, Housing Trust, put in front of you at your earlier hearing, some repurposed student accommodation they just could not make work because of the cost of having to transform that accommodation.

So look, it is really important that we look at all of these options that are on the table but some of them, just because they are vacant, does not mean that they are suitable for temporary accommodation. These are people's homes and we have got to make them able to be lived in as residential accommodation in the same way that you would have expectations for the place you live in or I live in and that is really important. Therefore, the cost of repurposing those dwellings or that accommodation becomes a critical factor in terms of how you can recoup that cost over the time that the property is available. If the time is too short and the cost of repurposing it too high, it just does not stack up from a financial viability point of view but that does not mean you can cut corners in terms of delivering liveable homes to the people that are going to live there.

Mr DUGALD SAUNDERS: Can I just jump in and just pick up on a point about the cost, I guess? One of the things that community housing providers probably look to is some more incentives. Can you comment on what sort of incentives might make it more viable from your perspective but also for Government perspective?

Mr DEGOTARDI: Well certainly there is — so the cost of a — I presume we are still talking about meanwhile use properties and...

Mr DUGALD SAUNDERS: And even further, Mark, if you like as well, to social housing generally.

Mr DEGOTARDI: Yes, for sure. So focussing on meanwhile use in the first instance, the cost of acquiring a property, so if it is property held by the private sector or by Government, if there is a cost of leasing or renting that property, that is certainly one cost to be considered. Then the cost — then there is the cost of repurposing the facility so it is suitable for residential tenancy and then we go into a normal management structure. So certainly for Government owned properties or Government owned land, if that land or property can be developed — delivered at no or low cost, then clearly that has an impact on the viability of the property but for meanwhile use properties in the Government sense, really what we are talking about is, are there pieces of land that can be repurposed for interim purposes that might be earmarked 20 years down the track for something else but in the interim, can be used for meanwhile use-styled properties. That is certainly something that Government could do and if they can provide that at low or no cost, then that certainly makes the meanwhile use proposition stack up more readily.

If you are talking about more permanent forms of housing, what is clear is from our model, which is a not-for-profit housing model, we can leverage finance. We have access to social housing tenants, to CRA and a range of other exemptions for tax and other things and that simply means that a dollar invested with us is going to be able to be leveraged into more housing than a dollar invested directly through State Government properties. So that is just the structure, we can invest in social and affordable housing. We have clear evidence that demonstrates that we will deliver more housing to the community for an investment from Government than a direct investment by Government alone. It does not mean that we should do everything and that is certainly not what we would advocate for but there really must — the benefit of that or the benefit of the community housing model should be recognised. That we can deliver more and more quickly, a range of community housing properties across the state and Government can facilitate that through either access to land, better planning controls or direct capital grants.

The CHAIR: Jenny?

Ms JENNY LEONG: Yes, thank you, Chair and thank you so much, Mark, for your submission and for, I guess, continuing to advocate for the community housing sector. It is very much my view that what we want to be seeing is a model where community housing is an additional thing in relation to having a strong and well-maintained public housing sector as well as recognising the need to address the social housing crisis and the housing crisis in the state by having a strong community housing sector as well. One of the biggest concerns I have is that this meanwhile use is a somewhat of a distraction to be seen as something that is somewhat innovative but in actual fact is just a band-aid solution to address the failures, to address the social housing crisis and the housing crisis in the state.

I wonder if you could talk specifically about the way that community housing — or your members, could actually be involved in re-shaping the Communities Plus model? Which is seeing public land, 100 per cent public housing, being redeveloped and then turned into what is 70 per cent private housing and 30 per cent social housing yet to be defined as what that is. I wonder what could be done in terms of supporting the community housing sector to see potentially more social and affordable housing being delivered in that space if the community housing sector was not required to compete within the private market and with private developers for that in terms of addressing the need for ongoing housing rather than meanwhile use and more temporary band-aid solutions.

Mr DEGOTARDI: Okay, I will try and load some context first and then specifically answer your question first, if I may? So look, in the overall scheme of things, I would be a very happy advocate if I did not have to talk about temporary housing accommodation because that would either mean that there was enough permanent housing or that there were not any people that were homeless or at risk of homelessness in the community. But look, that is patently not the case and so I think it is really important to talk about the continuum of housing whenever we have these discussions. The reality is that people will require temporary and crisis accommodation at any given point in time and that we should be providing that temporary and crisis accommodation in ways that help people overcome that immediate crisis and hopefully with support services and other things, transition to more permanent forms of accommodation is obviously the ultimate goal.

So there is a role for temporary and crisis accommodation. I think it is absolutely clear that we are only talking about meanwhile use because we are looking at ways of dealing with an acute housing shortage and that is why we are talking about it. There is no escaping that but the solution to acute housing shortage is a long-term solution and needs a long-term investment. So for me, it is absolutely sensible, given that that is where we are and it is what we face, that we are talking about temporary and meanwhile use-type. Having those sorts of discussions because we do need to provide some housing quickly for those families and individuals that are in crisis but if we want to tackle the longer-term structural problem, we actually have to start facing into the reality that there is an acute housing shortage in New South Wales and as we have seen during the pandemic, this is no longer the big city Sydney problem, It is no longer Newcastle or Wollongong problem.

We are reporting now across regional communities, both along coastal fringes and inland, an acute shortage of housing of any kind and we need to start talking about housing affordability not just about home ownership but about rental housing affordability and acknowledge the fact that we are going to have a growing cohort of people for whom renting is the long-term state of their permanent housing. More and more people will rent houses for longer. We have got reports across New South Wales of people simply being able to — even people with two incomes in their house, otherwise stable economic circumstances, simply being unable to find suitable housing. When that flows on then down to people on low to very low income, that problem becomes much more acute and leads to these kind of crisis or temporary accommodation options.

If you want to solve that, there is no getting around the fact that we need as a community to invest. There is no good — there is no point having a housing system where investment is based on the sale and redevelopment of your existing housing stock. That is only going to lead to an ever dwindling stock of social housing. It is important that Government does redevelop its stock and its housing stock is aging at present. So I am not against redevelopment of social housing stock, far from it, we need to make sure it is fit for purpose and suitable for the families that are going to live in that housing but we have to start investing in housing and start making that a long-term investment.

The role for community housing within that, I think, is really important and there is actually a role for the private sector as well. We need to build more homes generally and we need to target more homes for those families that are low and very low income that are going to be renting for the long-term. Community housing can provide some of those properties and we need to utilise the things that we can provide. Access to finance. The ability to build both social and affordable housing. These are things that are not available to the New South Wales Government through the Land and Housing Corporation so utilise us for that aspect so that the investment you make in community housing is leveraged through access to external finance and other opportunities that are available to us.

The Government has a role to provide social housing. Community housing has a role to provide social and affordable housing. Some parts of the private sector also have a role in affordable housing and then of course market housing, but everyone needs to play their part. It is really critical within that though, that we acknowledge that investment must be made and we acknowledge that in the long-term, private rental is a feature of people's lives for much longer periods of time. We need to start investing in this structurally, otherwise we will just keep having these conversations about the crisis acute end and not dealing with the most fundamental problem and that is decades long under-investment in rental housing in New South Wales.

Ms JENNY LEONG: Thanks so much for that, Mark. That is it for me, thanks, Chair and apologies Mark, I have to jump off now but thank you very much.

The CHAIR: Thanks, Jenny. Thank you. Mark, just so you are aware, David Harris, the member for Wyong has joined us this afternoon as well, as part of our Committee.

Mr DAVID HARRIS: Apologies.

The CHAIR: No, that is okay. We are all trying to fit in COVID-free parliamentary time and a million meetings around Committee hearings at the same time, so apologies for some members ducking in and out.

Mr DEGOTARDI: Not at all.

The CHAIR: David, did you have any questions? I know you have only just come in, I do not want to put you on the spot but did you?

Mr DAVID HARRIS: I might get up to speed.

The CHAIR: That is okay. All right, look...

Mr DAVID HARRIS: I did have it on the screen but I had to mute it.

The CHAIR: That is okay. Look, just one more question from me. What — how do you think CHPs can play a greater role in providing crisis and key worker short-term accommodation?

Mr DEGOTARDI: Yes, so certainly in terms of the key worker accommodation, as I mentioned with the earlier question, what we are seeing across a range of regional communities is now those people that are critical to the ways our communities operate and they are not just emergency services personnel. That extends to teachers and to cleaners and to a whole range of other service providers that make our communities run effectively, are simply not being able to access accommodation. So what we see as one of our fundamental roles is the fact that we can provide what we would call mixed tenure developments. So that is developments that have social and affordable housing and in some cases, private rental market accommodation as well, within those developments to try and alleviate these concerns over time. This is one of, I think, our key roles.

What we would like to see is more and growing partnerships with local councils and my members, community housing providers, have been really great at developing those local council relationships over time. That is critical because local councils really know what is required in their community. They know what is available and

they can be really effective partners with CHPs to get these developments off the ground but I think, too, we need to look at other policy settings around particularly affordable housing and particularly around affordable rental housing. I know I have mentioned this earlier in the hearing today but it is really important that we just do not focus on affordable housing for purchase. That is really important and yes it is a really effective way of wealth generation. It has been for some time. The notion of that is changing but that is perhaps an inquiry for a different time or a different place.

But we tend to focus, I think, too much on home ownership and simply not on affordable rental housing. What we would certainly like to see is more large developments, particularly where State Government has a role to play in larger developments, saying well, we are going to do these large developments but we are going to commit to much higher affordable housing targets as part of those developments and when we do these once-in-a-generation redevelopments, we take that opportunity to provide more social and affordable housing as part of those developments. It is absolutely feasible, it just takes commitment and engagement and partnership from State Government, for-profit sector, the not-for-profit sector and of course local councils, to engage with the community about how that is done. But it is really, really important local council role and the CHPs working with them to deliver that key worker housing as I am sure many have said to you, that is becoming a critical issue across regional and metropolitan New South Wales.

The CHAIR: Now, just on the purchasing of property as far as home ownership versus rental, what is your view on perhaps some of these developments that you are suggesting that we undertake with a mixture of rental, affordable? If we target perhaps first home buyers in the mix there to get them into the market from the beginning?

Mr DEGOTARDI: Look, it is really — I think it is really important we do both. I mean, I think sometimes the argument gets characterised that people who are advocating for social and community housing do not want people to own their own home or we are not interested in that. Nothing could be further from the truth and I think we need to get away from that simplistic kind of, there is either those who are for home ownership or those who are for affordable rental. You need all of these things along the continuum. So there are settings that are made in other jurisdictions, be they tax or otherwise, that will have huge impacts on affordable home ownership and you are probably thankful that that is not the purvey (sic) of this Committee's work but it is an important consideration at the Federal level and we will let others talk about that. But from my point of view, mixed tenure housing can be really great for developing fantastic communities.

Most of the developments for the community housing providers, if you walk past a new development of ours, you would not be able to tell the difference between ours and a for-profit private development of the same sort of type. That is really important and you should not be able to tell the difference. It is really important that we stop distinguishing between social housing as if it is some sort of subclass of housing. It is absolutely not and it should never be and the provider — my providers, are providing fantastic homes to people of low or very low income. It is really important within all communities that we have a range and diversity of people living in those communities. If that means that we make large developments where there are opportunities for market rental, social housing and affordable rental and indeed perhaps housing sale or ownership for first home buyers, that can all be thrown into the mix if it makes it feasible. If we are providing more social and affordable housing as a result of those partnerships or engagements, then that is obviously a great outcome from our perspective.

The CHAIR: Okay, thank you. Any other questions? Yes, well look, thank you for joining us this afternoon. We really appreciate your time and your submission as well. So thanks for being here with us this afternoon.

Mr DUGALD SAUNDERS: Thanks, Mark.

Mr DEGOTARDI: Thanks very much, everyone. Nice to see you all.

Mr JUSTIN CLANCY: Thank you.

The CHAIR: Thank you.

(The witness withdrew.)

(Short adjournment)

ROSS HAMPTON, Councillor for Western Region, NSW Aboriginal Land Council, affirmed and examined before the Committee via videoconference

The CHAIR: Thank you for joining us this afternoon. Did you have any questions at all in regard to the hearing?

Mr HAMPTON: No, not a great deal. I have been briefed by our administration so I understand that you

have received a submission from New South Wales Aboriginal Land Council in regard to housing so more than happy to proceed.

The CHAIR: Well again, thank you again for joining us this afternoon and would you like to begin with an opening address?

Mr HAMPTON: Yes, certainly and thank you for the opportunity to speak today. If I could just begin by acknowledging the Traditional Owners of this Country we are all meeting on today and pay my respects to Elders past and present. The New South Wales Aboriginal Land Council is the peak body representing Aboriginal people in New South Wales. The COVID-19 pandemic, I think, has highlighted and exacerbated the New South Wales housing crisis and myself, living out in the remote part of New South Wales in the far western region, I think I speak with a bit of experience that the COVID pandemic has certainly highlighted a number of shortcomings in terms of the housing situation out in our region, particularly for those remote communities. Unfortunately, whilst we were able to bring the housing situation under control, that certainly highlighted that we were operating in an environment where I think a number of aspects to the housing situation were quite evident as a result of the outbreak in remote communities and I think that is sort of right across New South Wales in general. The social housing shortage disproportionately impacts Aboriginal people who are more likely to seek social housing services, more likely to live in over-crowded housing and are less likely to own a home than non-Aboriginal people.

Access to adequate housing is a right under the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural rights and is an important way to address disadvantage. It is the Government's responsibility to ensure the availability of safe, affordable and culturally appropriate housing. Demand modelling for the Aboriginal Housing Office has shown significant deficit of social housing and affordable housing dwellings for Aboriginal people with demand projected to increase by 62% by 2031. New South Wales Aboriginal Land Council and the New South Wales Aboriginal Land Council Network, of which comprises approximately 120 local Aboriginal Land Councils, collectively is a major provider of dedicated social and affordable housing for Aboriginal people in New South Wales and on that point, I think our Land Council Network represents about 60 per cent of the Aboriginal portfolio across New South Wales to date.

In January 2019, New South Wales Aboriginal Land Council has established the NSWALC Housing Limited, NHL, which seeks to increase the amount of housing available to Aboriginal people, to give more Aboriginal people a choice of an Aboriginal provider. LALCs own over 2600 houses in New South Wales, the largest proportion of the total portfolio managed by Aboriginal community housing providers. About a third of the LALC housing stock came into the network as a result of the transfer of reserves and missions from the Aboriginal Protection Board and its successors. Sadly, much of this stock has financially burdened local Aboriginal Land Councils with the backlog of liabilities and legacy issues including substandard housing and asbestos. Revenue generated from rent is insufficient to rectify these issues in addition to providing and maintaining all services within the site's boundaries, including roads, water and sewerage.

Parties to the national agreement on Closing the Gap have recognised that Aboriginal community controlled organisations, including Aboriginal community housing providers, are best placed to deliver culturally appropriate service to Aboriginal communities. More needs to be done to improve the capabilities of the Aboriginal community housing sector. Government holds the levers and resources to support the supply of adequate housing. Governments have committed to urgently work with Aboriginal community controlled organisations to deliver critical housing services through Closing the Gap and we need Governments to meet their commitment.

On rental assistance, almost a third of Aboriginal households in New South Wales live in private rental. Forms of assistance like Commonwealth Rental Assistance, CRA, and New South Wales Government private rental assistance, are critical for Aboriginal people's access to housing. In 2019, over 9000 Aboriginal households in New South Wales were still in rental stress after receiving CRA. The 2020 Coronavirus supplement reduced this number by over 1000 households and NSWALC urges the Australian Government to conduct a review of CRA. On the social housing investment, NSWALC supports calls for significant investment in social housing, projections estimate a need for 330 social housing homes and 140,000 affordable housing dwellings to be constructed nationally by 2036. The current backlog of social housing maintenance, estimated to be between \$350 million and \$400 million and the Government bears an outstanding obligation to ensure housing conditions support successful tenancies.

NSWALC notes the New South Wales Government's 2020 commitment to \$50 million to the Aboriginal Community Housing Investment Fund and we seek an expansion of this initiative to ensure that all housing owned by LALCs also receive repairs and maintenance upgrades where required. Improving community housing, NSWALC recommends that the New South Wales Government increase funding for the community housing leasing program. NSWALC strongly supports that a proportionate amount of any funding be earmarked for Aboriginal community housing providers to better support tenancies of Aboriginal peoples in a greater range of locations.

The best means of supporting Aboriginal community housing providers involves sustained transfers of stock to management to support operation at scale and we acknowledge that the National Regulatory Scheme for Community Housing can provide better benefits for larger Aboriginal community housing providers by supporting

participation in growth initiatives. Its introduction as the basis for registration under the *Aboriginal Housing Act 1998* must not lead to reduced access to funding and support from New South Wales Government for LALC housing. An expanded property market transfer program should be designed to allow Aboriginal community housing providers to take the next step in growth plans to operate at scale and NSWALC recommends that the New South Wales Government commit to design of the expanded program through a collaborative approach with Aboriginal community housing providers seeking to operate at scale and sector peaks each year and NSWALC. Thank you, very much.

The CHAIR: Thank you, Ross. I would just like to ask you, what factors need to be considered to ensure that housing is culturally appropriate for Aboriginal people?

Mr HAMPTON: That is a very good question and I think sometimes we get into a situation where it is a one size fits all and everybody in the same bucket. I think when we are dealing with Aboriginal people and Aboriginal communities, they are all different. We have urban, regional and remote communities and much of that design concepts around Aboriginal housing, it is always — we are always putting ourselves in the one bucket, so to speak, by the way we follow procurement processes.

We do not spend a lot of time in terms of working with individual communities and individual applicants from waiting lists. I myself, I am an ex-New South Wales Government employee through New South Wales Aboriginal Housing Office for many years and I can remember the days when we used to do housing. We used to actually invite the applicants from the waiting list to be part of the design concepts, the fit-outs, the layouts of how they wanted their house to be established, thereby giving them some form of ownership into the project, which also then led to better rental collection because those people — the applicants themselves, by being involved from the coalface, actually then saw that as being their home, not just somebody being placed in a house that they had an input into but more or less part of the whole process of from construction and design, right through to fit-out and then into the management space.

Mr DUGALD SAUNDERS: Can I jump in there, Chair? G'day, Ross, it is Dugald Saunders here. I am from Dubbo and we obviously...

Mr HAMPTON: Dugald.

Mr DUGALD SAUNDERS: ...had a fairly significant COVID outbreak and one of the things that COVID did was sort of probably show the rest of the state in some way, shape or form, what locals know and that is that some of our Indigenous community do not just live in one house. They might be between a couple of houses in the same street or up the road a little bit.

Mr HAMPTON: Yes.

Mr DUGALD SAUNDERS: Do you think there needs to be a different approach then for — particularly for Aboriginal people and the community around how that housing might differ? Not just culturally appropriate but also, I guess, the culturally appropriate is a slightly different thing and that is how people do live with their aunty or uncle or grandmother. That sort of thing?

Mr HAMPTON: Yes and thanks for the question, I think it is a very important one because often, as I said before, we just sort of design a house to put on a block of land without giving consideration to how the family make-up is. The family interactions. And similar to Dubbo, I am out in the far west, so I look after the communities from Cobar, Wilcannia, Broken Hill, right around to Balranald. So what your situation in Dubbo is very similar to the communities that I work within and we have had discussions at the local level and even with Minister Pavey and also with the Aboriginal Housing Office about how we should perhaps move to a concept of family-type construction so that you have a bit of an enclave set aside for — on a piece of land that may incorporate two or three bedroom house plus a couple of two-bedroom units or whatever to accommodate the whole family.

The nucleus of the family, rather than just husband and wife. Because what we tend to see, and you would know it very well Dugald, is that with our mob, we do not say — or knock back any of our people when it comes to accommodation. If somebody needs a bed or somewhere to sleep, the door is always open. So rather than create what I would call hidden homelessness or overcrowding issues, it is a way we have to move, I think, in how we design more culturally appropriate housing to address the nucleus of that family rather than just an applicant on a waiting list.

Mr DUGALD SAUNDERS: It can be hard to do, can it not, when we look at — I mean, we do not want to see large scale enclaves where it is purely an Aboriginal community. We really want a mix of people and particularly in a place like Dubbo. I mean, the make-up of Aboriginals is large and they are very much an important part of the community so it is about fitting those scenarios and those solutions in with other parts of the community as well, isn't it?

Mr HAMPTON: Yes, most definitely and you would be well experienced around the issue around West Dubbo. I certainly worked in AHO in those days and also in South Broken Hill when a similar situation occurred

there. So it is certainly not about creating that environment where it is a — just an Aboriginal housing situation. It has to be in amongst the community in general and the last thing we want to see is to be ostracised, I suppose, and just seen as an Aboriginal reserve, so to speak. It has got to be integrated into the whole of society.

Mr DUGALD SAUNDERS: Can I just ask finally, just around the Aboriginal housing providers? One of the things that is noticeable sometimes and you referenced this in your earlier statement, just around there are some houses that are sort of boarded up now and not actually used. You referenced the fact that some of those housing providers do not have the capacity to fix them. Is that — I mean, have you got ideas on how to make that happen? The sort of money that is required? What that might mean, et cetera, if you could do that work?

Mr HAMPTON: Yes. I think the first thing I would acknowledge is that there has been significant investment into the sector over years by both Commonwealth and State Government. I think it is about how we invest that money to ensure that it has the right outcome. Too often, I think what we have done in the past is, we have — through our procurement processes, is just open it up to tender where you have contractors coming in from outside of community and sometimes in the far west, coming from as far away as Sydney to do work which does nothing to invest or build capacity within community itself. What we have got to start doing is providing opportunities for the community people to take ownership to how they first of all look after their houses, pay rent for their houses. Ensure that all costs are covered as part of that.

I think the biggest challenge for a lot of our Aboriginal community housing providers is to be fair, I think a lot of them have stepped into a situation where the properties have not been to standard to begin with. So right away, they are in a situation where they have got a backlog of repairs and maintenance which the rental collection just is not able to address. The subsidy levels from the New South Wales Aboriginal Housing Office certainly go a way to addressing their resource requirements but the immediate needs in repairs and maintenance, I think far outweigh the subsidy payments or — that are made to assist them in delivering their work.

I think the more we can build capacity within community and offer alternative solutions to how we maintain properties, I think we will go a lot further than the way we are currently working where it is piecemeal. As an example to that, recently we had the Aboriginal Housing Office put out an expression of interest for funding for providers for repairs and maintenance. I think the tune — the amount of dollars available was around the \$54 million mark and the expression of interest that came in totalled \$170 million. Now, that clearly shows that there is a big disparity between what is actually required as opposed to what is available. So somewhere along the pathway we have to, I think, work out how we can get the best out of very unique situation here and that is by building capacity in community. Getting community involved. You would recognise, I think, that a lot of our people out in particularly the remoter area are all on benefits because there is not a lot of employment opportunities. So the more we can do about building capacity in community and offering sustainable jobs as well as sustainable tenancies, I think the far better off we will be in terms of Aboriginal housing going forward.

Mr DUGALD SAUNDERS: Thanks, Ross. Good on you, mate.

Mr HAMPTON: Thank you, Dugald.

The CHAIR: Ross, can I just ask a question? Being a city slicker that I am, what is — how do you think as far as regional and remote communities are being serviced, would a — in building new social housing, how do you think would a house and a granny flat suit your community? I mean in the cities, it is a little bit difficult to do some of those developments now because obviously land is at a premium but for remote and regional communities, is — do you think that is the best model?

Mr HAMPTON: I think it is one of the models we should be looking at. I think there is a number of options and I think it is really about — I think the question that Dugald asked about the family complement. I think that is where we have to start looking. Where you have got a three or four bedroom house but you have also got grandma, grandpa with a couple of kids that they care for who are also looking for accommodation, I think the answer is to explore those sorts of things like granny flats on the same property so you are really creating that nucleus or family nucleus which keeps everybody together but obviously having their own space and certainly reducing the overcrowding situations that currently exist within a lot of our communities today. So I think from your question, it is a definite yes but I think it is one of a number of options that we should be looking at to progress in meeting the housing needs out that way.

The CHAIR: What do you think is the best solution for community in the cities?

Mr HAMPTON: I have lived in the cities as well so I know there is certainly a big difference and this is where I say it is not a one size fits all when we talk about meeting Aboriginal housing needs or any housing need. It really comes down to the area that we are situated in. In the city areas, I see the investment that is being made in community housing as opposed to the Aboriginal housing sector is like chalk and cheese, where we would like to be on the same, I guess level playing field. Recognising that we do have work to do in the Aboriginal sector but I think if you are able to, in the city, start developing those models where you have Aboriginal housing providers who are on the same playing field as the mainstream community housing providers, that allows them to work a lot more

closely with the Aboriginal population to develop their specific housing needs and you would know that there is a lot of Aboriginal land councils in the city area with good land that does offer up housing options. I think by setting those partnerships in place, you would probably start addressing some of those housing requirements for the city dwellers.

Mr DAVID HARRIS: Yes, Ross, just on that, you are 100 per cent correct that some of the Land Councils have land and they often get preyed upon by developers...

Mr HAMPTON: Yes.

Mr DAVID HARRIS: ...to sell their land and...

Mr HAMPTON: Yes.

Mr DAVID HARRIS: And I think it would be great opportunity to partner with Government instead and to build houses. I know my area on the Central Coast, Darkinjung developed a 100 unit development and kept a percentage for community but they ploughed the profits back into other programs. That seems a much better model than just selling land off. Has the Government been to have discussions about those sorts of partnerships with — I do not know what they call themselves anymore. They used to be Land Com but...

Mr HAMPTON: Yes.

Mr DAVID HARRIS: Land and Property Management are they? Something these days. They changed their name, anyway.

Mr HAMPTON: Yes, it depends what the day is, I think, in terms of the name changes within Government agencies. It is very challenging but you have got a good operator up there now in Darkinjung in Brendan Moyle. So if you do not know Brendan, you should take the time to meet him. He is a wealth of knowledge around housing. But certainly, I think the opportunities you talk about there are not unique to NSWALC. We have certainly had discussions with Government about partnering and we are also now in the process of working with — directly with Local Aboriginal Land Councils, what we are calling land activation. So that is basically setting up those sort of housing estates, not just for Aboriginal people but for whole of community, which provides a return to the Local Land Council to venture out into other enterprises and businesses but also to give something back to community.

Just on the development side, I think that the history is there. You would well know it that there have been some classic cases of ripping the system off, so to speak. But I think the safeguards that are now in place through membership with land dealings and then those land dealings being signed off at the Council level, have certainly reduced that level of abuse in terms of land developers ripping the Land Councils off. So as NSWALC, we are certainly quite appreciative of the history but we are also now trying to — through the *Land Rights Act* amendments with land dealings, ensure that Land Councils are protected and that by NSWALC giving that final tick to any land dealing around development that those safeguards are now in place.

Mr DAVID HARRIS: Yes, that is a really good initiative. Just on the maintenance issue, and I have been — visited many of the communities out your part of the world.

Mr HAMPTON: Yes.

Mr DAVID HARRIS: And further north and south. You are 100 per cent right about them being handed over in dilapidated condition and then Land Councils have been expected to fix them. It has created a huge amount of conflict in the community and you are probably aware, too, of where the Land Council cannot afford to fix the houses so people stop paying rent, which means they are less able to fix the houses. Do you have any idea when the last audit was done on those sorts of premises and is there a dollar figure for getting things up — back up to the level that they should be in order to create a level playing field to move forward?

Mr HAMPTON: Yes, all good questions and good points. I think that is one of the challenges we have, is for a provider coming in to manage, it is about having stock at a certain standard so that when you come in to manage, you are starting off on a level playing field, not having to play catch-up football in terms of maintenance issues. I know that — you would be aware that some of the Land Councils or Aboriginal providers across New South Wales are still under head lease to AHO and as part of that exit strategy that AHO have put into play, where head leases will, I guess expire, in December 2022, they are undertaking a pretty detailed scoping exercise of properties.

So I could not give you an exact figure on what I would think it would be to bring the stock at this stage up to a standard but just the exercise that was recently run where an expression of interest indicated that Aboriginal housing providers were looking for \$170 million as opposed to what was available on the table was \$50 million, \$54 million. It just shows that the disparity between the reality and what program dollars are available is well and truly off the mark. But it — in saying that though, I think there is a lot of work to be done on the ground with our tenants as well because once you start, I guess measuring, maintenance issues within the community, there is no doubt that there is tenant damage.

So it is a matter of how we manage the difference between what a tenant is responsible for as opposed to true repairs and maintenance. So that is why I talk about community capacity building. If we are going to start anywhere, it has got to be about starting at the ground level, working with those tenants so that they fully understand that this is your house, really, because there is very small turnover in Aboriginal housing to start with. So basically, that house, they are in that house forever and a day. If not themselves, certainly their other family members would be in that house following on. So it is really about building that capacity at a community level and ensuring that tenants clearly understand what their rent money is going for but also what sort of benefits that they can attract from both State and Commonwealth Governments, such as rental assistance, that assists them in out-of-pocket expenses, so to speak.

I think too much today, the CRA is used as disposable income rather than what its real purpose is, which is rental assistance. So it is how we change the mindset, re-educate people or perhaps even get to the day where perhaps that assistance is paid directly to a management provider which solves half the problem of rent collection. But I certainly take your point about the repairs and maintenance and it is a big issue. I would love to have a figure to quote to you but unfortunately, I have not got it today.

Mr DAVID HARRIS: That is all right. Just finally, one last question. Are you aware currently, given as you just say that most people live in their house for a long, long time, has any of the LALCs come up with rent-to-buy schemes so that ultimately, as you say, they have that ownership that after a period of time they actually would own the property?

Mr HAMPTON: Yes, I will give you an example. I worked in Broken Hill six or seven years ago and worked very closely with the Broken Hill Local Aboriginal Land Council. They were one of the first ones out our way to introduce the rent-to-buy. They actually achieved a successful transition from rent-to-purchase for about six of their households, which was a major achievement in going back in those days. So certainly those sort of initiatives have been out there and what we as NSWALC are currently doing is developing some housing strategies around home ownership options for our people. Particularly the land councils and we would love to get to the stage where people on the reserve could actually own their own house.

There are a couple of key programs in play at the moment, particularly the Roads to Home Program, which is about the infrastructure, roads and services on the reserves which then leads into the actual — what do you call? Subdivision. Which then hopefully would be to step in — the next step into home ownership. So it is a matter of us planning out with the Land Councils a pathway for that home ownership. That is on the reserves but we would certainly like to see a major increase in home ownership in all Aboriginal housing. So there are options out there and rent-to-buy is certainly one of those on the table. We just need to ensure that we get the framework right to ensure that both parties are bound by a legal process. Yes.

Mr DAVID HARRIS: Yes, thanks Ross.

Mr HAMPTON: Thank you.

The CHAIR: Thank you very much, Ross. Did you...

Mr DUGALD SAUNDERS: No, all good.

The CHAIR: Okay. Jen? Jenny?

Ms JENNY LEONG: Thank you so much, Chair and thank you so much, Ross, for your contribution and submission. Apologies that I was running late to this session. I wanted to ask specifically about — and I was listening — I have been listening in for most of it. One of the biggest concerns that I have, I represent the area of Newtown which includes Redfern.

Mr HAMPTON: Yes.

Ms JENNY LEONG: One of the biggest issues we are seeing in that community is basically the Government selling off public land. Or let us be clear, it is Gadigal land but, you know, they like to call it public land. The Government is selling off public land to private developers when at the same time there is a desperate need for social and affordable housing and particularly for Aboriginal housing. We hear from the community housing sector that they are set up to have to compete with the private developers in terms of that market and that space. It is even harder for Aboriginal-owned and run CHPs and housing providers to have to then compete with the large CHPs and the private market. Do you think there are options and opportunities for the Government to be able to identify parcels of land, projects, that would be for specifically Aboriginal-run community housing providers so they could be run and owned? Is there capacity within the Aboriginal housing space for that to be done? Or would extra support and investment be needed before that could be achieved?

Mr HAMPTON: Thanks Jenny and look, that is a very good question. I think the starting point for me would be, obviously from a NSWALC perspective, would be working with Government to try to see if we could get some better outcomes in the undetermined land claim area. Particularly around that Sydney area where there are still

a large number of land claims outstanding and has been for some time. So the opportunity that I would see and it is something that we have always talked about within NSWALC at the Council level, is how better we can partner with Government to re-negotiate or work through a pathway that sees land claim numbers reduced but also by establishing offsets which is exactly what you are saying. Perhaps land swap deals where we look to actually withdraw some claims for access to other parts of land, which allow then for those sort of housing developments to take place.

I think the opportunity does exist there but it just means that we need to get NSWALC and Government on the same page and hopefully in a position where we can see the benefits and we all acknowledge that housing needs are only increasing, they are not decreasing. So we certainly need to have a look at — for our point of view, the land claims, to see how better we can offset those for land swaps to allow for housing development. I take your point about Redfern, you would probably be aware of the old block down there, in Eveleigh Street where there was big plans to put a magnificent building in place many moons ago but unfortunately it has not transpired that way but yes, touch wood, we will get there.

Ms JENNY LEONG: I — yes, that is an unfortunate reality of the pressures on everybody that means that the community is the one that loses out of that process.

Mr HAMPTON: Exactly, yes.

Ms JENNY LEONG: But there is also now a beautiful empty block that the Government is trying to sell off which we are trying to get in Waterloo, so we [inaudible] we will hold out hope as the [inaudible]...

Mr HAMPTON: Okay, well if you need any help with that, come and talk to us.

Ms JENNY LEONG: I will let you know. I will let you know when we are locking onto the bulldozers, I will give you a call, Ross.

Mr HAMPTON: Lovely, thanks, Jenny.

The CHAIR: Okay, Ross, thank you very much for joining us this afternoon. We appreciate your time and your insight into the enquiry today.

Mr HAMPTON: Thanks members and I hope it has been beneficial. Thank you, very much.

The CHAIR: Thank you, very much.

(The witness withdrew.)

(Short adjournment).

DINI LIYANARACHCHI, Ageing on the Edge Advocacy Lead, Ageing on the Edge Forum, affirmed and examined before the Committee via videoconference

GLEN-MARIE FROST, Advocate with lived experience, affirmed and examined before the Committee via videoconference

The CHAIR: Thank you for joining us this afternoon. Did you have any questions in regard to the hearing today?

Ms LIYANARACHCHI: No but I am waiting for Glen-Marie to join. I think she is having a few issues. I am assuming you are following up with her?

The CHAIR: Okay, yes, I think we are trying to get in touch with her via the phone.

Ms LIYANARACHCHI: Okay.

The CHAIR: Would you like to begin with an opening statement?

Ms LIYANARACHCHI: Yes, please. Before I begin, I would like to acknowledge that I am joining from the lands of Gadigal people of the Eora Nation. I pay my respects to Elders past, present and emerging and any Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people with us today. I would also like to acknowledge that sovereignty over these lands were never ceded and that housing disproportionately impacts on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. Again, thank you for the opportunity to give evidence today. Housing for the Aged Action Group was established over 30 years ago as a grassroots movement. The organisation delivers a housing information and support service in Victoria and advocates for older people experiencing housing and homelessness-related issues across the country.

In 2016, HAAG was funded by The Wicking Trust, a philanthropic organisation to conduct a research project on older people and homelessness in every state and territory. In 2020, HAAG was funded for a further four years to bring that awareness into action. Ageing on the Edge Forum in New South Wales was formed initially to

produce the report and the group continued to grow as a coalition to advocate for older people in New South Wales. There are currently about 75 members in the coalition — I am getting a bit of feedback, I am not sure if it is just me though?

The CHAIR: [Inaudible] you but that is okay.

Ms LIYANARACHCHI: Okay, I will just continue. So our membership includes peak bodies and some of them have given evidence before you today, like Shelter New South Wales and CHIA New South Wales. We also have large and small-scale service providers like Uniting New South Wales, Mission Australia and Women's Housing Company. We also have academics and individual advocates. As highlighted in our submission, although short-term housing options such as meanwhile housing, form a part of a suite of solutions for a small group of people, it is not an appropriate option for older people. Social and affordable housing stock has steadily declined in New South Wales as well as a drop in home ownership among older people.

Older people, as you already know, particularly older women who are experiencing or at risk of homelessness are unlikely to prefer living in temporary accommodation. Even where there are housing options available, they may not know how to navigate the complex service landscape to find appropriate housing for them. Some may not have access to computers or internet or even recognise that they are experiencing homelessness. These challenges are exacerbated by policy responses such as age requirement for priority housing in New South Wales. Our research indicated that an estimate of 110,000 women over 55 in New South Wales are at risk of homelessness and meanwhile housing and other temporary housing options are significantly inadequate to address this growing issue. I asked another woman with lived experience to give evidence today but because she has a housing application, she asked me to share that story with the Committee if that is okay?

The CHAIR: Thank you.

Ms LIYANARACHCHI: So we have de-identified her. So Maree is a 69 year old woman who lives in a caravan in South Coast. Everything she owns is now stored in the caravan and in an annexe. She was made redundant in 2015 and was unable to find suitable employment due to age discrimination. She started her social housing application process in April 2018. Since then, she has had about 40 interactions and communications with the Department. Most of these interactions were to ask for additional information and when she went to a shopfront and provided the evidence, people at the counter would accept the materials and then later she would receive an email or a phone call indicating that evidence was inadequate. On two occasions, she has provided information to the Department, expecting urgent consideration only to find out some months later that the Department merely filed her information and did not assess it.

This included a series of forms to get her on the priority housing list. Maree has some physical and mental health concerns including arthritis. She has provided the Department with supporting documents to establish these. All her social networks and her medical supports are in Sydney's inner-west. Although she struggles with living in a caravan, she has her own space. She is only allowed to be in the caravan for 180 days per year so she has to housesit for the rest of the year and during COVID, because no one was going on holiday, she was unable to do so. She is also concerned that the caravan park may be planning to remove many of the onsite caravans to make more sites available for campers.

When we got to know about Maree, we linked her with some of our member organisations to provide transitional or temporary housing. She said those options were not suitable for her. She stated that, I would rather not move multiple times and incur costs of paying for removalists, spend weeks organising for a move, only to move back to the caravan or another temporary place. I cannot afford to pay for both the caravan site fees and temporary accommodation and I risk being truly homeless if I give up the caravan for anything less than a permanent solution. Moving house is physically demanding and mentally exhausting for people like me. I cannot make connections in a community only to move elsewhere and lose all the friendships.

So people like Maree are waiting for long-term, stable and affordable housing options and meanwhile housing is not an appropriate solution for them. Her experience of navigating the system whilst managing other challenges in life demonstrates how complex the housing application process is. We are calling on — as a coalition, we are calling on the New South Wales Government to invest in a service based on Home at Last modelling, Victoria, which is detailed in our submission. We are also asking the Government to lower the age of priority for social housing from 80 years and increase the social and affordable housing stock by 5000 a year per year for 10 years and we are asking 20 per cent of that be earmarked for older people. I do not see Glen-Marie, so I am happy to take questions while she joins us.

The CHAIR: No, she may be there now.

Mr DAVID HARRIS: Maybe just dropped off.

The CHAIR: Did you get her on the phone? Dropped out.

Mr DAVID HARRIS: She just dropped off.

The CHAIR: Dropped off, okay. Can I just ask, sorry, I did not quite catch where did you say she was living?

Ms LIYANARACHCHI: She is living...

The CHAIR: What area?

Ms LIYANARACHCHI: So Maree is the case study. She is in South Coast at the moment in a caravan park.

The CHAIR: South Coast. Okay, we will try and get her back on if we can.

Ms LIYANARACHCHI: Oh, sorry. That is not Glen-Marie.

Mr DAVID HARRIS: It is a different...

Ms LIYANARACHCHI: Glen-Marie is dialling in. This is another case that I shared with you.

The CHAIR: Oh, okay. Sorry. Is there any questions while we are waiting for Glen-Marie?

Mr DUGALD SAUNDERS: Hi, Dini. My name is Dugald. How are you going? So one of the things you talk about is the non-suitability for most people or most aged people, I guess it depends on where you are starting that from, for temporary accommodation. I mean, there is probably some that are between 55 and 65 that maybe there would be but in general, is there a style of housing or something that makes it more challenging to provide that temporary accommodation to aged people? Apart from obviously physical, maybe, abilities or lack of?

Ms LIYANARACHCHI: Thank you, so we are not saying that meanwhile housing should not exist, it is just that we believe that it is not suitable for older people. Unfortunately, there is no consistent definition for older people in New South Wales. In the homelessness strategy, there is a definition that calls older women over 55 but some of the other documents refer to older people as people over 60 and the priority age is 80. So there is really no consistency but we know in Victoria, older people are considered people over 55 so they do have access to priority housing. In terms of appropriateness, I think the issue we see is that majority of these women have had complex lives and are in complex situations so what they are looking for is more long-term, temporary, stable accommodation so like the aging strategy recognises, a place for them to age in place. If that answers your question? I am happy to elaborate.

Mr DUGALD SAUNDERS: Yes, do you want to just expand a little bit with, you mentioned the Home at Last program and I know it was in your submission as well. Do you want to just tell us some of the key points that you think make it a worthwhile program to be looking at?

Ms LIYANARACHCHI: Sure. So that model is an early intervention, prevention and ongoing support type of a model. So we have people with lived experience — sorry, there is a bit of feedback.

Mr DUGALD SAUNDERS: I think that might be Glen-Marie coming through, maybe, on the phone.

Ms FROST: Do you want me to hang up?

Ms JENNY LEONG: Someone else has joined on the phone.

The CHAIR: Glen-Marie, is that you trying to join us?

Ms FROST: That is me. I am here. Can you hear me?

The CHAIR: Good afternoon. Yes, we can hear you.

Ms FROST: Hello. Oh my gosh. Technology.

The CHAIR: No, that is okay.

Ms FROST: Dini, are you still talking?

Ms LIYANARACHCHI: I was giving an answer but I am happy to give you the opportunity to...

Ms FROST: No, no, no. No, it is okay. You go ahead.

Ms LIYANARACHCHI: All right, thank you. So the Home at Last model is an early intervention, prevention model like I mentioned. So they have community educators who are peer educators, people with lived experience, who actually go into the community. So they could be cultural events, libraries, GP practices and talk about different forms of homelessness and they essentially start from scratch by talking about what different forms of homelessness look like. Once they are come into the service — so they can be referred to the service from another community service or the Government services or they can look us up. Once they come into the service, an intake worker will sit with them and identify what is most appropriate for them. It might be negotiating with the landlord to reduce the rent or install rails or get them on the Housing waiting list so people like Maree, the case study I mentioned, would truly benefit from that service because someone from that service will sit with them, source all

the supporting documents and submit the [inaudible] to social housing.

Then once the application is through, they will follow up on the application. Once they are approved for a property, our services will accompany them to inspections and once they are happy with a property, there is some discretionary funding to pay for the removalists but also source them some whitegoods to settle in the new place. During that whole process, depending on their age and their needs, they will be linked with NDIS or Aged Care or other community services as well. I am happy to provide additional details in writing after the hearing today.

Mr DUGALD SAUNDERS: Thanks, Dini.

The CHAIR: Thank you. So Glen-Marie, thank you for joining us this afternoon.

Ms FROST: Thank you for having me.

The CHAIR: Well look, thank you for joining us this afternoon. I am Wendy Lindsay, the state member for East Hills and I am the Chair of the Community Services Committee. I also have Dugald Saunders who is the member for Dubbo, who is the Deputy Chair; David Harris, the member for Wyong; Melanie Gibbons, the member for Holsworthy; and Jenny Leong, the member for Newtown, all sitting in on this Committee hearing this afternoon. So thank you for joining us and would you like to just give a brief opening statement?

Ms FROST: Yes, well Dini has asked me to speak today on my own experience, basically, but I really want to take it a bit further than that. Look, I have to say upfront that there is no discrimination as to who becomes homeless. Women escaping domestic violence, ill health, no savings, deserted wives having no savings in the bank account. The list goes on and on. My personal situation was waiting on a long list for a knee replacement and having to travel interstate for clients on a weekly basis as an educator and motivational speaker. I was in agony on a walking stick and I could not really sit in the back of cars. Getting on and off a plane was just agony. It became so painful and difficult and also not a good look on a crutch when you are trying to motivate a class, so I resigned all my business. Therefore no income and then no money to pay my rent. I was 64 years old.

Trying to get a job in middle management. I no longer wanted upper management. I did not want — I no longer wanted to lead a company. I was conscious of my age and also my life at that stage but trying to get a job, I had, look, two very supportive leading recruiters, it proved impossible. I had a comprehensive and a highly successful CV and I realised ageism was — look, it was alive and well. I stayed with different supportive friends over a period of 18 months in Sydney before going to the Southern Highlands to look after people's homes for nearly four years. I placed my name on a Housing list when I arrived in Bowral. I returned to Sydney over three years ago to be a full-time carer for my now 92 year old frail mother. Also, I missed my son.

Again, I was staying with friends and I have got to say, look, I am one of the most fortunate people in the world because I have loving support. Most homeless women do not. One thing I guarantee you is they do not contact family because they do not want them to know what has happened and also they are getting on with their lives, they have got young kids and they do not want to be a burden. So it is most women are like that. Several years later, I still had no roof over my head. Thank God, I am now living in Women's Housing and I work part-time as a civil celebrant. Having been interviewed on national television and in print on homeless issues, my telephone rang all times of the day and night from homeless women and I mean at 2 a.m. in the morning.

I was inundated for about three weeks and they all had a similar cry. Hear our voice. No one hears us. I am not a victim. I want to contribute to society. I cannot get a job, they say I am too old. I cannot navigate the complex social system. You have to be Einstein. [Inaudible] these sort of comments. I prefer to sleep in my car or a friend's garage than go to a shelter or hostel. I have been trying for a year to get housing or affordable accommodation but the same — it was repetitive. Most of these women come from conventional housing backgrounds and they all had their own story as to how suddenly they became homeless. You know what the worst of it is? I am listening to them. I could empathise but I could not advise them who to call or where to go, to meet someone who can advise them on housing options.

It also became very clear to me that we must lower the priority housing for women from 80 years of age to 55 as is the position in Victoria. We also need to offer a service to women on the brink of being homeless as to how to avoid this. We must prevent more and more women from ending up living in cars and on the street. I now call them the invisible ones. This could be any one of us. It could be someone you know, it happens so suddenly. If it could happen to me, it can happen to someone across the street or any of my relatives. We must — I also believe we have to provide this transitional housing, emotional support and the diversified continuum of services focussed on safety, empowerment and self-sufficiency. Our homeless older women are not victims. They just want support to contribute to the community again.

I have become involved with the Equanimity Project. Women supporting women. We find nurture carers in metropolitan areas where housing prices make it harder for women to live alone and rural areas where there is a lack of accommodation and support services. They take a homeless woman, more often one escaping domestic violence, often older women, and pair her with a woman who has trained to be a nurturer carer and is starting to stay in her

own flat or home. We pay the board for the extra room. It is a win-win. A unique program where one woman at risk of homelessness can support another woman escaping an abusive relationship or living in her car.

The State Government has now provided millions of dollars to building more hostels and shelters. Look, I have got to tell you, I do not know any woman I have spoken to who said I will go to a shelter or I will go to a hostel because what they really need is to go somewhere that is quiet and safe. They do not really want other women around them at this time. Particularly if they are escaping domestic violence. You know, I just understand — for the life of me, I just do not understand why the Government cannot think outside the square and look at organisations like the Equanimity Project and Living on the Edge. Live with them. Talk to them. We work with these women, we hear their voices. However, as a community, we do not in New South Wales or Australia. Homeless women over 55 has increased 75 per cent in the last 10 years. I passionately believe more women should be supporting our cohort of older women who suddenly find themselves for no reason of their own doing end up homeless. Thank you all for your valuable time.

The CHAIR: Thank you, Glen-Marie. Jenny?

Ms JENNY LEONG: Thank you so much, Glen-Marie and thank you, Dini, as well for your submission. I think just to sort of affirm that everything has been shared and what you are pushing for is absolutely what is needed and I really want to offer my support for what you are advocating. I guess thank you, Glen-Marie, for sharing your story. In terms of being able to hear the real impacts of the failures of the Government having addressed — to have addressed these issues. The question I guess I wanted to put to you both is the immediate things that this Committee could recommend that would go to addressing some of the concerns that you have raised. The inquiry itself recognises that there is a shortage in social housing and meanwhile use is seen as a — if you like, in my view, meanwhile use is a band-aid solution to deal with a failure to have invested properly in social and public and affordable housing. So if the Government is progressing down that path, at some point we still need safe, secure, affordable homes to people to live in long-term. What should they be doing and what should we as a Committee be recommending right now that they do to address particularly the issue of older women's homelessness and homelessness and housing insecurity for older people in our communities?

Ms FROST: Dini, do you want to go first?

Ms LIYANARACHCHI: Sorry, Glen-Marie, [inaudible]. I am happy to start and then you can jump in?

Ms Frost: Yes, okay.

Ms LIYANARACHCHI: So thank you, Jenny, for the question and we definitely see that there is a need for a service response like the Home at Last model. People like Maree, the case study I shared, would not have been in the general housing waiting list having their applications pending if there was a targeted service to support them navigate the system. We know a lot of older women who do not — do not identify that they are experiencing homelessness or even when they do identify, do not know how to navigate the system. So that service navigation would be one thing that we would really like the Committee to recommend. The second one is definitely to lower the priority age for social and affordable — social housing. Currently it is 80 years and I just had a look at the numbers. So there are about 8000 women over 55 in the current waiting list as of 30 June 2020. Of the 8000 women, 869 are already on the priority list so if we are to lower that age or priority, it is likely that we are adding a whole heap of other women to the priority list so we need to see the supply go up as we lower that age of priority.

There was that funding announcement, the \$183 million announcement, which is a very welcome investment in social and affordable housing. My understanding is that \$30 million of that is dedicated to 80 small-scale solutions for older women with over 8000 women over 55 in the waiting list and 869 on the priority list, that 80 is not going to be even close to being adequate. So we do need to see a huge number of Housing properties coming through and what we are also needing is the Government to recognise that older women in particular are an emerging cohort and have a number of housing dedicated to this cohort.

Ms FROST: I agree with everything...

The CHAIR: Glen-Marie?

Ms FROST: Yes, I — look, I echo with everything that Dini just said, without being repetitive. I — look, there is a huge dilemma out there. I think one of them also is that when we take someone into affordable housing or whatever, I think there is also got to be that extra care that I mentioned because depending on how they are when they come in, if they are running from domestic abuse, they need the services they are offering — we are offering at Equanimity Project, with psychologists and a whole lot of things. Then getting her ready to face the outside world, so to speak and get a job. Because these women want to and I think ageism in the workforce is something we have to address.

There is something I want to take on separately to what we are discussing today, next year and I really want to go to about 10 CEOs, all men as [inaudible] and ask them to take the culture in their organisations to speak to HR because most of these women I spoke to want to work. If they are in affordable housing, they want a job because

they are young enough to still work. You have then got the other — I still think the idea of getting women to support other women is a really good one. There are so many women in rural areas who actually have a spare room or a flat and they are finding it very hard to pay their bills. To have someone come in and to be there and to be paid to share the costs, I think it — it can be any time from four weeks up to 12 weeks and — while we work with them as well. There is — also, the other thing is, with domestic violence victims, it gets them out of Sydney away from the perpetrator and he cannot find them in the country.

Look, there is also other things. This was just my ideas but what I found with these women, they want to contribute. They are not takers. They just do not expect a roof over their heads forever. We should be proud of them. We should be supportive of them because they feel that way. They are not — they have not got their hand out, they just want safety and a roof. Maybe — I do not know if it is possible or not, but if something at the back of my mind, we can build a little village out there somewhere with very small affordable housing and in that, each of them has to contribute to the property so they have a responsibility. Then they feel worthy and they are contributing and it brings the cost down then of maintenance.

Look, there is so many things if we sat around a table that we could come up with. We are really interesting. I mean we could be leaders but I think the stuff they want to contribute, they could be in a situation given a job as well to help pay for — to support the housing. I do not — I cannot see how in time we are going to build enough — the housing we actually need. So we have got to start thinking, as I said, outside the square and come up with other concepts because it is just going to get worse. We do not even have the COVID figures yet. Can you imagine the COVID figures with domestic abuse? I mean, they will be horrific. We have got the women coming to us now and it is a desperate situation.

But I think for me, look, I am young and I am always going to feel young and be young, irrespective of what happens to me and I am positive but it is easy to get beaten down. I slept in my car for two days and the reason I did that is because I could not go to anyone. I did not want to ask a friend for a roof over my head. I just could not do it and I needed that space and I came out of there so strong and resolute. I never felt ashamed what happened to me, I was angry. I was so angry that I could let myself get into that position. Mind you, I had left a long marriage with nothing and things like that a few years earlier, but that is not the point. The thing is, I had never protected myself and now I am out public speaking, encouraging young women to actually protect themselves and if you go into a relationship, it is okay to say I want to keep my own savings over there.

Anyhow, I am digressing but the thing is, I would like to see you consult more with organisations that are actually contributing and doing it. Not just put up hostels. I think affordable housing and getting women to contribute in properties is a good idea because they want to and we get onto cracking that workforce to start bringing them in. They all — they will all reinvent. They want to reinvent and there is people — they are our older generation and I just cannot believe we are not respecting them.

The CHAIR: Thank you, Glen-Marie, for that and yes, it is true. I think we do need to focus on our youth a little bit and give them some financial planning skills for later in life. It is definitely something that...

Ms FROST: Yes.

The CHAIR: ...needs to be addressed for your young women, that is for sure. And young men, too.

Ms FROST: Well the figures have proven that.

The Chair: Yes.

Ms FROST: The figures have proven that and that is why it has got to come down to 55. I could not believe the number of women in their 50s who were calling me. That is shameful and I also cannot believe there is so many people out there that just do not have friendship support. I am blessed, they are not.

The CHAIR: Well thank you for joining us this afternoon, I do not have any other questions. Do any...

Mr DAVID HARRIS: I had one which is related but a little bit different, is under the senior's SEPP, there is a loophole which allows younger people to move into accommodation that has elderly people. I have found that one of the issues is around safety. I understand that when people have mental illness et cetera, they need somewhere to live too but I have always been concerned that many accommodation blocks that contain mainly elderly women have younger people move in who become quite threatening and that has made some older women homeless because they have had to move out because they feared for their own safety. Have you come across any of those sorts of issues?

Ms FROST: Yes, thank you for that. I did. I was shown a flat in — one of those big three tall apartment blocks. Is it Waterloo or somewhere up near there? The three big towers. They have got all the apartments. Anyhow, I was taken — I went there to look at a flat. It was the only one that was ever offered to me in all that time of seven years and first of all when I walked in, the [inaudible] was to go down into the building, there probably were 12 stairs. Bush either side. Very dark and I went in and there was security on reception. I was taken upstairs with my

friend to the fifth floor and the smell of urine was so overpowering. Then when I got out, there was a guy who was obviously on drugs. You know, up — going from wall to wall, trying to mumble something to me.

There would have been a dog in the flat on the same floor that would have been a big dog because I have animals — or I did have and the thing is, when I got inside, I thought that the space was bigger than where I am now and everything else but I would not have survived there because I can tell you now, when I got back upstairs, there was a guy walking down the road with a metal bar saying he wants to kill the world. Now, how could I park my car up there and go and — it is only a little tiny bomb but the thing is, if I parked it up there and then went down there — I have not changed the way I look and dress and neither should I but I was — I stood out.

But I did — no older people and I saw them there. I saw these young people that I believe did not just have the [inaudible] mental illness but they had drugs. They were druggies. Now, I live in Woolloomooloo and opposite me is a public housing. I see it all the time here and the houses here where you have got three and four people who are obviously not just mentally ill but taking drugs. In fact a lot of people around here take drugs but you cannot put — what frightened me in that building is exactly as you have said. What about the people that want safety? It was not safe. I was scared and I do not scare easily so you are absolutely right and thank you for thinking of it.

Ms JENNY LEONG: Just to say as the local member that represents the community living in public housing in Waterloo and I think that we need to recognise that people with serious mental health and drug addiction problems are not getting the support they need from the State Government.

Ms FROST: I agree.

Ms JENNY LEONG: The lack of cleanliness in those properties is as a result of the failures of the State Government to adequately maintain our public assets. It is such a shame that that is the case but it is really important for just — I appreciate, Glen-Marie, that that can be an intense experience for people but I think it is really important to put on the record that those communities are basically dealing with a horrific privatisation agenda that has seen a defunding of maintenance and public services and public support to support those that are actually in really desperate need of help and support and instead...

Ms FROST: That is true.

Ms JENNY LEONG: ...are left to their own devices because of the failures to invest adequately in that — in those services and supports.

Ms FROST: You are absolutely right and I see these lovely old women around here but — ones they are like me. You get to know your neighbours and then you are safe but the thing is that no one ever visits these people to even see what their places are like. They are a shambles from the outside and then you have got somebody else three doors up who has got a lovely little garden on the balcony and everything else and — but I think where we go wrong sometimes is when you walk into places, this is yours forever. I think that is the wrong thing to say to people. You know? I mean, if we are going to give things away for life, then you are going to run out of housing. It is a — it is just the wrong attitude. I just felt I had a look at the young woman and I said 'no, I am not'. But you know, it — yes, I think when those — there has got — look, we have to protect those that are mentally ill without doubt and I do not think we do that.

Ms LIYANARACHCHI: Can I quickly add something to that as well? I know we are out of time but very quickly, we made a submission as a coalition to the SEPP Senior's Inquiry which I am happy to share with the committee. Our concern was mainly around the increasing of the age from 55 to 60 years, which also goes back to my comment around inconsistency with age. I have not been aware of that loophole but I also have a feeling that a lot of people who have experienced homelessness are prematurely aging. Therefore they may be accessing those options because they do not have anywhere else to go but personally I have not come across that issue but happy to share our submission and our concern was mainly around increasing the age from 55 to 60 in the senior SEPP.

The CHAIR: That would be great, Dini. Thanks. Well thank you both for joining us this afternoon and for providing us with some insight into how you work and live every day. So thank you for being here this afternoon and being a part of the inquiry.

Ms LIYANARACHCHI: Thank you very much for having us.

The CHAIR: Okay, thank you, Dini.

Ms JENNY LEONG: Thanks a lot.

Ms FROST: Thank you for the opportunity. Sorry I am still so emotional and passionate about doing something.

The CHAIR: That is okay. Thanks, Glen-Marie for...

Ms FROST: I am really keen to see some movement.

The CHAIR: Thank you for joining us today.

(The witnesses withdrew.)

The Committee adjourned at 16:50.