

**Submission
No 73**

INQUIRY INTO SOCIAL, PUBLIC AND AFFORDABLE HOUSING

Organisation: Family Support Newcastle

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Inquiry into social, public and affordable housing

Family Support Newcastle is a community organisation working with disadvantaged families with children in their care, mainly in the Newcastle LGA. The children in these families, through no fault of their own are severely hampered from getting the best start in their lives. Increasingly we notice that a significant factor preventing us from making a difference to their wellbeing is the lack of social or affordable housing.

We work with families where:

- parents have no viable alternatives to living in cramped conditions with extended family
- children have been removed into care because the parents cannot provide safe accommodation for their children.
- women stay in violent relationships because there is nowhere to go
- parents with mental illness are overly stressed by inadequate housing
- housing stress is significantly impacting parent's ability to adequately nourish their children or provide for adequate health care.
- Parents and children are 'living' in cars

The outcomes of not providing adequate social and affordable housing are very costly, even in the short-term. The most common argument for not making a significant and rapid increase in social and affordable housing is that we do not have the money. People making this argument are taking a very narrow view of the situation. You only have to widen the field of vision to include health, social services and crime to immediately be able to see that even in the short term better housing would generate savings. In other countries for example, it has been shown that providing supported accommodation to street people, immediately saves on health costs by improving their physical and mental health and reducing time spent in health facilities.

In the medium to long term, it allows children to have more stable education, increased safety, and improved integration into community life, better nutrition and health. This provides a better foundation for healthy adult citizens who have much to contribute to our society.

We are a wealthy state in a wealthy country. Recently in Newcastle a local church has established a program where families living in cars can park safely at night and have access to a toilet. It is appalling that we should have to count this as something to be pleased about while we watch as huge amounts of our wealth is spent on sports stadiums, elite sports, end-stage health intervention, New Year's Eve celebrations, etc.

FSN requests:

- a formal plan, with numerical targets, to increase the supply of social housing in NSW over the next four years, to be developed on a cross-portfolio basis within the NSW Government and in partnership with the Federal Government. It should ensure a 10 year growth in supply that is 10% higher than the demand to ensure that within 10 years we are able to meet the demand;

- that capital funding be provided for a Community Housing Social Investment Fund which will develop innovative housing responses in agreed high need areas, and
- that the state government include social housing as a form of infrastructure investment and commit the proceeds from Waratah Bonds to invest in the development of new social housing supply.