

**Submission
No 49**

**INQUIRY INTO HOMELESSNESS AMONGST OLDER
PEOPLE AGED OVER 55 IN NEW SOUTH WALES**

Organisation: Local Government NSW

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The Hon Scott Barrett MLC
Chair of the Standing Committee on Social Issues
Parliament House
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Inquiry into homelessness amongst older people aged over 55 in New South Wales

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on the inquiry into homelessness amongst older people aged over 55 in New South Wales. Local Government NSW (LGNSW) is the peak body for local government in NSW, representing NSW general purpose councils and related entities.

This is a draft submission until it is endorsed by the LGNSW Board. We will advise at that time if there are any substantive changes to the submission.

Context

LGNSW notes that the Minister for Planning and Homes, Anthony Roberts, has made it clear that his number one focus is on housing supply and affordability and that the delivery of a pipeline of supply is a new focus of the Department of Planning and Environment.

The NSW Government is also currently considering the Regional Housing Taskforce recommendations to determine how best to improve housing supply and affordability in regional NSW and is expected to release a response in 2022.

Local Government NSW is represented on the NSW Government's Expert Housing Advisory Panel, which has been established to oversee the delivery of the Housing 2041, NSW Housing Strategy, and provide advice to the Minister for Planning and Homes. As such, we look forward to ongoing contributions to better support older people experiencing, or at risk of, homelessness to obtain and maintain secure accommodation.

The role of councils in addressing homelessness among older people

While the NSW Government is ultimately responsible for housing and homelessness, and the Commonwealth Government is responsible for significant financial assistance to improve housing and homelessness outcomes, councils too are often involved in responding to homelessness.

Councils invariably manage a large degree of homelessness through:

- their responsibility for maintaining public space,
- planning decisions,
- provision of community services/facilities,

- advocacy,
- management of community concerns and complaints about rough sleeping,
- conducting outreach programs, and
- clean-ups and syringe disposal.

Councils also work closely with a range of housing and homeless services, domestic violence agencies, police and specialist homelessness service providers that operate in their respective areas. Councils assist with case management of people at risk of becoming entrenched in public spaces.

With regards to older people, the ageing population in NSW presents both a challenge and an opportunity for all local councils to support their communities and help residents continue to lead full and rewarding lives as they age. To facilitate the delivery of these outcomes, many councils are now developing and implementing their own ageing plans and strategies.

In undertaking this role in the ageing sector, councils acknowledge, and work with, a diverse cohort of older people who are at an increased risk of homelessness. These include:

- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander older people,
- older people from migrant and refugee backgrounds,
- older people in rural, remote and regional areas,
- older people with disability, mobility and mental health issues,
- (increasingly) older women, and
- the LGBTIQ+ community.

Councils need further support from the NSW and Commonwealth Government to tackle the issue of homelessness in older people. The LGNSW [Strong and Inclusive Communities Position Statement](#) (statement 19), calls for continued State and Commonwealth funding to supplement the contribution of NSW councils of approximately 60% towards the cost of community development roles, including those working in the ageing sector.

Response to Terms of Reference

In Attachment A, LGNSW has responded to the Inquiry's Terms of Reference that are particularly relevant to the role and services of councils.

Thank you again for the opportunity to provide input to this Inquiry. If you would like further information on LGNSW's position, please contact Chris Maclean, Senior Policy Officer, Ageing & Disability on 02 9242 4043

Yours sincerely

Damian Thomas
Executive Manager Advocacy

Attachment A – Response to Terms of Reference (ToR)

This submission below refers to specific Terms of Reference that are particularly relevant to the role and services of NSW councils.:

ToR (a) – the rates of homelessness,

Statistics from two local government areas, Blacktown and Newcastle, give an example of the extent of homelessness in older cohorts.

In the Blacktown area, there were 2469 people reported as being homeless in 2020/2021. Of these 188 were over 55 years of age. As in many LGAs, Blacktown's ageing profile raises significant concern for the welfare of older residents, especially women.

In the Newcastle area, nearly a quarter of people experiencing homelessness were in the over 50 years cohort i.e. there were 1000 estimated people experiencing homelessness on Census night in 2016 and 240 were older persons over 50 years of age. The top types of homelessness for the older age group were:

- 112 living in boarding houses (84 M, 28 F),
- 37 staying temporarily with other households,
- 37 in supported homeless accommodation,
- 17 older persons were living in tents or sleeping out.

ToR (d) - Services to support older people who are homeless or at risk of homelessness, including housing assistance, social housing and specialist homelessness services,

To address this term of reference regarding services for older people who are homeless or at risk of being homeless, LGNSW makes four key points:

1. LGNSW supports in principle the recommendations in the Report: Home at Last: Solutions to End Homelessness of Older People in NSW developed by the Ageing on the Edge Forum and coordinated by the Housing for the Aged Action Group (HAAG).

This includes calling on the NSW Government to fund a service to support older people plan for their housing future and navigate the often-complex housing service system in NSW before they reach crisis point.

2. There is a need for age-specific homelessness services for older people and more awareness raising of what services are available.

Older people are often facing homelessness for the first time in their lives and need assistance to navigate their way through the complexity of welfare and support options to gain a housing solution. There are targeted Specialised Homelessness Services (SHS) for certain cohorts, such as young people and women escaping domestic and family violence, but often not for older people. One example is the Home at Last service in Victoria which provides a one-stop

shop housing information and support service for older people. More of these services targeted to older people are needed.

3. The aged care system needs to more adequately support people who have experienced homelessness.

The Royal Commission into Aged Care Quality and Safety (2021) found that the current aged care system is not adequately equipped to support people from a range of backgrounds, including those who have experienced homelessness or are at risk of becoming homeless. The Commission made a series of recommendations relating to Specialist Homelessness Service agencies such as providing personal advisers for older people in order to link them with housing services as well as developing more affordable and appropriate housing.

4. There is a need for responsive and innovative services

The Council on the Ageing NSW (COTA) notes that planning and regulatory systems at state and local government levels will need to be responsive and adaptable to cater for an ageing population. As our population continues to age, there will be an increased need to develop a range of housing choices, including the exploration of innovative dwellings and tenure such as co-housing, cooperatives or mixed equity.

COTA also noted in its research the importance of ensuring specific crisis accommodation is available for single older women facing homelessness. One example is the Older Women's Studio Development Project. In 2017, The Project released a report to inform design guidelines for housing of single older women experiencing homelessness. The older women engaged in the project reflected that they were prepared to trade space for having an individual unit of their own.

Early intervention services are important to prevent homelessness. Early intervention can include support in managing rental arrears, assistance in obtaining essential household goods, and more generalised support needed to maintain a tenancy.

ToR (g) - Options to better support older people to obtain and maintain secure accommodation and avoid homelessness

Available, affordable and inclusive housing is the number one solution to ensuring older people maintain secure accommodation. To address this term of reference LGNSW refers the Committee to examples of our recent advocacy on housing.

1. Open letter

In May 2022, LGNSW raised the profile of the need for urgent action on housing right across NSW by issuing an open letter calling for urgent action to address the housing crisis impacting communities across NSW. The letter includes calls for both a greater supply of affordable rental housing, as well as more social housing.

2. Advocacy priority

The LGNSW 2022 Advocacy Priorities include a call to both the NSW and Australian Governments to address the housing availability and affordability crisis.

LGNSW is calling on the NSW and Australian Governments to:

- Lead coordinated and innovative action across all levels of government to re-house people in the medium and long term following floods.
- Invest \$2.6 billion annually over the next 10 years to build 5,000 additional units of social housing each year, to drive economic recovery and address the homelessness and housing affordability crisis right across NSW.
- Investigate alternative social and affordable housing models and commit to deliver social and affordable housing targets.
- Take action to reduce housing disadvantage impacting Aboriginal people in NSW.
- Support a royal commission into housing affordability and the future of housing in Australia.

LGNSW is calling on the NSW Government to:

- Introduce stamp duty recycling to invest in new housing stock for essential workers and equalise the social housing stock.
- Respond to and implement the recommendations of the NSW Regional Housing Taskforce.
- Ensure that targets for housing growth specifically include targets for social and affordable housing.
- Consider legislative tools that will assist councils to manage the impact of short-term rental accommodation on local communities, without cost shifting regulatory responsibilities to councils.

3. NSW Budget Submission

LGNSW has also called for substantial investment in social housing in its 2022/23 NSW Budget submission. We note that lack of housing is having serious impacts on community wellbeing and economic recovery. We also note that urgent action is needed to reach the Premier's Priority to reduce street homelessness across NSW by 50% by 2025.

4. Submissions on housing affordability

- a. Parliamentary inquiry into options to improve access to existing and alternate accommodation to address the social housing shortage (Aug 2021)
- b. Regional Housing Taskforce (Aug 2021)
- c. A consultation draft of the Proposed Housing SEPP (Sept 2021)

5. Resolutions at LGNSW Annual Conferences

Various NSW councils have raised conference resolutions aimed at addressing affordable housing and homelessness issues across the State. These include:

- That LGNSW endorses the 'Everybody's Home Campaign' to end homelessness and provide affordable housing for all Australians.

- That LGNSW lobbies the NSW Government to address homelessness as a state issue that requires a strategic targeted response across the continuum of crisis, short term and longer-term solutions for social housing.
- That the NSW Government provide greater funding, and implement support programs, to address homelessness in communities across the State.
- That LGNSW advocates for the NSW Government to actively lead and contribute to the implementation of initiatives to combat the homelessness crisis in NSW, including funding for local government to deliver initiatives at the local level.
- That LGNSW calls on the NSW Government to provide funding to address social housing stock deficits in the regions, to raise regional housing stock levels up to the state average.
- That the NSW Government recognises that homelessness is not just an urban issue and increase funding for homelessness support in rural areas.

Further resolutions of the 2022 LGNSW Special Conference sought action to address the issue of homelessness for all cohorts, including for older people. These include:

- *Ballina Shire Council – Royal Commission into affordable housing*
That Local Government NSW develops a campaign seeking support for the establishment of a Royal Commission into the affordability and future of housing in Australia.
- *Byron Shire Council – Stamp duty recycling for housing investment*
That Local Government NSW lobbies the NSW Government to:
 - a) secure the 'recycling' of transfer duty and land tax revenue into local government areas experiencing house price inflation and homelessness, housing shortage and rental stress to invest in new housing stock for essential workers, lower income and vulnerable members of the community and;
 - b) use 'stamp duty recycling' as a mechanism for equalising the social housing stock across the state so that local government areas that are behind the state average can catch up over the next decade.
- *Shoalhaven City Council – Impact of holiday homes*
That Local Government NSW asks the NSW Government to consider legislative tools to assist councils with the impact of short-term rental platforms on local communities with respect to long-term rental availability.
- *Shoalhaven City Council – Social and affordable housing models*
That Local Government NSW requests that the State Government investigate different models for social and affordable housing, such as equity share and covenant housing.
- *Wollongong City Council – Affordable housing: caravan parks & manufactured home estates*
 1. That Local Government NSW works with the Department of Planning and Environment, NSW Fair Trading, Office of Local Government and the Affiliated Residential Park Residents Association (ARPRRA) to:

- a) Explore options to ensure and secure that caravan parks and manufactured home estates are recognised as providing affordable housing options for many people, including retirees, pensioners, and people on low incomes.
- b) Highlight the need for secure tenancy for long term residents of caravan parks and manufactured home estates against becoming homeless, or the threat of becoming homeless, due to owners who refuse and/or vacillate in the renewal of lease agreements with councils.
- c) Prioritise the rights of residents of caravan parks and manufactured homes estates against becoming homeless, or the threat of becoming homeless, due to owners who refuse and/or vacillate in the renewal of lease agreements with councils.

2. NSW councils accept and affirm the need to protect the right for residents currently living in caravan parks and manufactured home estates to be provided with housing security, especially where they have valid leases with park owners and have purchased their homes in goodwill.

ToR (h): - The adequacy of the collection of data on older people experiencing or at risk of homelessness and opportunities to improve such collection,

Several councils have noted that sufficient, relevant data around older people and homelessness is not available or is not up to date or accurate. There is a growing need to collect more data on this cohort and to collate available data from different organisations into one overarching database.

Some councils put extensive research in to collecting local data however there is not capacity for this across all councils. For example, The City of Newcastle has conducted extensive recent consultation on the matter. Council has consulted with the Hunter Ageing Alliance in December 2021 to draft the Local Social Strategy, and also conducted consultations between February and May specifically with local Specialist Homelessness Services (SHS) and community agencies focused on housing issues for older people.