

Supplementary
Submission
No 69a

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

Organisation: Shelter NSW

Date Received: 28 July 2022

July 28, 2022

Mr Scott Barrett MLC
Chair, Standing Committee on Social Issues,
NSW Parliamentary House,
6 Macquarie Street,
Sydney NSW 2000
Via email: socialissues@parliament.nsw.gov.au

Dear Mr Barrett,

RE: Supplementary information regarding 'meanwhile use' and the NSW social housing waiting list

Shelter NSW recently made a submission to the *Inquiry into Homelessness amongst older people aged 55 in New South Wales*; firstly, as part of the *Ageing on the Edge Forum* and secondly, in our own right with separate and additional set of recommendations.

For your convenience we have included here the combined [submission: \(Ageing on the Edge endorsement plus Shelter NSW\)](#).

The purpose of this letter is provide supplementary information which we believe may be valuable to the Committee post the public hearings. Our staff have watched the hearings and have noted much interest in the issues surrounding the social housing waiting list (and specifically, the eligibility criteria for the 'priority list'). We have also noted the occasional discussion of the concept of 'meanwhile use'. This letter provides additional information about both topics which we hope will assist the Committee in its deliberations.

Over the last two years Shelter NSW has provided recommendations regarding the application of 'meanwhile use' and offered very practical suggestions for some simple changes in planning regulations that may assist councils to be more supportive of this approach.

For clarity we at Shelter NSW do not see the freeing up or repurposing of unused buildings to be a substitute to social housing, but we do believe it could be helpful.

Please refer to *Appendix E: Change planning regulation to support 'Meanwhile Use'* at page 15 of 54 of our submission to the current inquiry (link in first paragraph) for an overview. For the detailed and practical recommended changes in planning processes please refer to a set of recommendations Shelter NSW made to a [Legislative Assembly Committee on Community Services](#) in August 2021 which explicitly explored the potential of 'meanwhile use'. If the Committee has any questions about this, please feel free to contact me.

Our staff have also noted quite a bit of discussion during the public hearings of the social housing waiting list, recommendations to reduce the age for priority classification (from 80 years) and general queries about the experience of applying and being assessed for and waiting for social housing.

At the outset, we observe that social housing has become a scarce Government 'product' – access to which one could easily describe as 'rationed'. Shelter NSW would like the Committee to be aware of some very recent and comprehensive research. The City Futures Research Centre (UNSW) is an esteemed and expert research body. Its May 2022 [research](#): *Waithood: The experience of being on the social housing waiting list* is, we believe, an important resource for the Committee. For transparency, Shelter NSW was part of a funding consortia for this project.

The research highlights the extent to which state governments (in varying degrees but especially in NSW) have used eligibility criteria and wait list management procedures as rationing tools. The age of 80 as a priority or greatest need social housing eligibility criteria in NSW is a good example of that. This mean that the provision of social housing is quite a long way from responding to need (formal or unexpressed). The research includes:

- *Analysis of waiting list registration and social housing allocation policies and procedures*
- *Analysis of waiting list dynamics and the profile of waitee households*
- *Investigation of waitee circumstances and the coping strategies that waitees use to manage their everyday lives.*

The report is very large so we recommend the Executive Summary in particular, highlights of which I have noted here (with our **emphasis**):

- In 2020-21 just under 30,000 applicants were granted a social housing tenancy, Australia-wide, compared with 52,000 in 1991 – a 42% reduction. Proportionate to population, the latest figure is 61% down over the period.
- Indicators of recently intensifying stress on social housing systems in particular jurisdictions include the following: **in NSW the proportion of total new tenancy allocations to high priority applicants increased from 41% to 60% in the six years to 2020-21. One outcome will be substantially lengthening wait times for eligible, but non-priority, waiting list applicants**
- Nevertheless, the longer-term national trend in waiting list registrations has been largely flat. Since this fails to parallel rising housing need as indicated by homelessness and rental stress statistics, it seems likely that **waiting list trends are highly influenced by administrative practices in the management of access to social housing by state/territory governments.**
- **Social housing waiting lists now see high rates of ‘churn’, with the large cohort of applicants newly registering each year paralleled by substantial numbers exiting lists without being allocated a social housing tenancy. Unpublished statistics for NSW suggest that in 2020-21, over 6,000 registrations were cancelled or otherwise ended during the year, in addition to the 12,000 ended via a social housing tenancy allocation**
- **There are marked variations in current waiting list eligibility rules and management procedures in different states and territories:**
 - NSW and WA appear to have the most restrictive (or ‘targeted’) criteria for assigning priority status to waiting list applicants...
- **Restricting eligibility to register for social housing is central to the rationing of this scarce resource in Australia**
- Despite virtually static overall numbers, **NSW has seen growing need involving Aboriginal households (up 11% in the period 2012-2020), applicants aged 55 years and over (up 9%), and single person households (up 4%).**
- **In NSW priority applicants are housed seven to 14 times faster than general applicants, with median wait times of 2.5 to 3.6 months for the former.**

For the purposes of the Committee, we encourage a review of the different ways states define eligibility for social housing (general access and the much coveted priority or 'greatest need' category). This leads to very interesting and contrasting outcomes. NSW for example, sets the gross weekly income limit for social housing eligibility for single people to be \$655 while Victoria sets this limit at \$1,059 (refer *Table 14 – Income and asset limits as at 1 July 2021 (national comparison)* on page 42).

The research also covers the range and relative provision of housing services provided by states and territories which can be summarised under three headings: social housing services, financial assistance (private housing) and specialist homelessness services. Information about this can be found from page 20 of the report (as well in detail throughout the report).

For further information about the research itself the Committee can contact the project lead Professor Hal Pawson from the Associate Director, City Futures Research Centre via email: _____ or by phone: _____

We commend the Committee for its focus on the important issue of homelessness amongst older people in NSW and again offer of assistance in the Committee's deliberations.

If you wish to discuss our submission in more detail, please contact our Senior Policy Officer Cathy Callaghan on _____ or by email at _____

Yours Sincerely,

John Engeler

Chief Executive Officer, Shelter NSW