Submission No 71

INQUIRY INTO RURAL HOUSING AND SECOND DWELLINGS REFORM

Organisation: Lydia's Legacy Southern Highlands Homelessness

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Submission

to the

Select Committee on

Rural Housing

and

Second Dwellings Reform

Submitted

by

Lydia's Legacy Southern Highlands Homelessness

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Contents

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1. About Lydia's Legacy Southern Highlands Homelessness

The Lydia's Legacy Southern Highlands Homelessness project, is comprised of members of predominantly local churches in the Southern Highlands NSW.

Jesus encouraged the church to look after orphans and widows, and anyone in need. Churches are frequently the place those in need go to request food, clothing, showers, financial assistance and emergency accommodation. Much is already in place for short term homelessness accommodation amongst local churches. However, a significant gap has been identified in medium to long-term accommodation for the homeless.

The local Southern Highlands churches have identified a need to work together to address medium to long-term homelessness. Lydia's Legacy seeks to contribute to addressing this issue.

The Lydia's Legacy proposes a plan of action that will not be a financial burden on the government, and more importantly, it is a project that is immediate and relatively simple to implement.

2. Organisations Represented on Lydia's Legacy Southern Highlands Homelessness

The following organisations have representation on Lydia's Legacy Southern Highlands Homelessness:

- Anglicare
- Argyle Housing
- Bowral Baptist Church
- Bowral Church of Christ
- Bowral Seventh Day Adventist Church
- Called by Name Church
- Camden Wollondilly Wingecarribee Network
- Connect Christian Church, Moss Vale
- Highlands Community
- Highland Christian Church, Mittagong
- Homelessness Avoidance Project

- Mittagong and Bowral Uniting Churches
- Mittagong Anglican
- Older Women's Network
- Robertson Anglican Church
- Saint Judes Anglican
- Salvation Army
- Sector Connect
- Vinnies
- Wingecarribee Shire Council.

3. Mission and Values

The ethos and mission for the Lydia's Legacy Southern Highlands Homelessness is:

➢ Every person experiencing homelessness deserves to be treated with dignity, empathy and respect.

➢ Understanding the unique and complex challenges homeless people face underpins our approach in providing tailored support to meet their medium to long term housing needs.

➢ By working alongside local churches, government, non-profit organisations, businesses, and community members, innovative medium to long term accommodation solutions are created.

➢ By providing individuals experiencing homelessness with the provision of secure housing, they can be empowered to focus on using medium to long-term tools and resources they need to rebuild their lives.

➢ The commitment of Lydia's Legacy Southern Highlands Homelessness to provide medium to long-term accommodation is unwavering. The mission statement serves as a guiding light in the efforts to create a society where everyone can live with dignity and security.

It is not merely up to the government to build more homes to accommodate the homeless. Rather, a smarter approach to provide medium to long-term accommodation for homeless people can be achieved in a cohesive and united approach.

Our vision is homelessness in the Southern Highlands will be a rarity, not a reality. We strive to build a community where every individual and family can thrive, free from the fear of poverty and the uncertainty of living without a home.

4. Overall Strategy

The goal is to provide accommodation for people in need in the Southern Highlands of New South Wales as soon as possible, and to eventually eradicate homelessness in our region.

In Sydney and capital cities, land sizes are compromised. However, many residences in the Southern Highlands have the space and capacity to easily accommodate a caravan/tiny home on their property,

Tiny homes offer a quick, realistic and comfortable way of providing medium to long-term accommodation for homeless people. As people transition from social to affordable housing, tiny homes can also be used to assist people to get 'back on their feet' more quickly.

Ordinarily, most residents would not normally think of putting a caravan/tiny home on their land to house a homeless person. However, if the strategy of doing this facilitates a financial benefit, and appropriate structure, support and monitoring for both the landowner and the recipient are in place, it is a win-win situation for the resident and the homeless person.

Therefore, the ability to provide a home for someone is almost 'immediate' and the associated practical requirements minimal.

The major advantage to all this is the greatly reduced cost to the government and home owner. For the government, the amount paid for a more conventional home would be much higher, and the provision of housing this way is much quicker than most expect. For the homeowner, there is no initial outlay of the purchase of a tiny home, only, perhaps some cost of installation.

The number of homes where a tiny home could be added is impossible to estimate, but given the right incentive, this could be a substantial method of reducing homelessness and providing affordable housing in the shortest timeframe possible. That said, it is hoped there could be more than ten tiny homes established under this project in the first year.

5. Local Challenges

An increase in large dwellings in the Southern Highlands over the last 10 years has prevented housing stock that is reflective of population needs ie more affordable and smaller dwellings.

Less than 4% of available rentals are affordable for people on income support.

Over 20% of residents earn less than $800 per week, yet weekly median rent in the Southern Highlands is $653.

6. Homelessness – Some Facts

Homelessness is when a person:

a. does not have suitable accommodation:
b. a person's dwelling is inadequate,
c. they do not have any security that they can stay where they are, or
d. they do not have control over their space.

Those who are most likely to experience homelessness are those who have experienced family and domestic violence, young people, children on care and protection orders, people leaving health or social care arrangements, and Australians aged 45 or older[1].

The Southern Highlands is in the Federal seat of Whitlam. Whitlam is experiencing a housing crisis. In the 2025 Salvation Army *Social Justice Report*, 70.1% of people identified housing affordability and homelessness as an issue in the community[2]. A high 33.6% identified it as an issue for themselves. This is higher than the 2022 Social Justice Stocktake figures.

Homelessness is a complex and growing issue influenced by structural, economic and policy factors. According to the 2021 Census, NSW recorded 35,011 people experiencing homelessness, representing the highest number among all Australian states[3]. This equates to a

[1] House of Representatives Standing Committee on Social Policy and Legal Affairs. (2021). *Final report: Inquiry into homelessness in Australia.* https://parlinfo.aph.gov.au/parlInfo/download/committees/reportrep/024522/toc_pdf/Finalreport.pdf;fi
[2] Salvation Army. 2025 Social Justice Stocktake. Social Justice Whitlam. https://www.salvationarmy.org.au/scribe/sites/auesalvos/files/social-justice-2025/nsw/TSA-NSW-Whitlam-SocialJusticeStocktake25.pdf
[3] ABS. (2023). Census of Population and Housing: Estimating homelessness, 2021. https://www.abs.gov.au/statistics/people/housing/estimating-homelessness/latest-release.

homelessness rate of 43.4 persons per 10 000, slightly below the national average. However, there is considerable variation across regions.

The *Australian Homelessness Monitor 2024* reports that homelessness in NSW has been rising steadily since 2011, with a 37% increase in the five years to 2016[4]. Although temporary declines were observed during the COVID-19 pandemic due to emergency accommodation, this was not sustained post-2021.

The NSW *Specialist Homelessness Services* (SHS) assisted over 70,000 clients in 2021–2022, a figure that includes individuals sleeping rough, couch surfing or living in overcrowded dwellings[5].

Women, particularly those escaping domestic violence, represent a growing proportion of the homeless population. Between 2018 and 2023, NSW saw a 20% increase in women accessing homelessness services due to domestic violence[6].

Youth homelessness also remains critical. In NSW, around 9 400 young people aged 12–24 were homeless in 2021, often due to family breakdown, housing instability, and financial hardship. Alarmingly, a significant proportion of youth cycle in and out of homelessness due to inadequate exit pathways[7].

On the national level, the 2023 Australian census found that homelessness is a widespread issue. On any given night, 122,494 people in Australia are homeless[8]. In 2021, 23% of all people experiencing homelessness were aged between 12 and 24 years of age[9].

Nationally, of those experiencing homelessness in 2021:

1. 68,516 (55.9%) were male, an increase of 1.6% from 2016
2. 53,974 (44.1%) were female, an increase of 10.1% from 2016[10].

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[4] Pawson, H., Parsell, C., Clarke, A., & Moore, J. (2024). Australian Homelessness Monitor 2024. City Futures Research Centre. https://cityfutures.ada.unsw.edu.au
[5] Australian Institute of Health and Welfare. (2023). Specialist Homelessness Services Annual Report 2021–22. https://www.aihw.gov.au
[6] Ng, M., Buxton, A., Martin, C., & Pawson, H. (2023). Gender, Housing Insecurity and Homelessness in Australia: Data Insights. UNSW. https://unsworks.unsw.edu.au
[7] Tillakeratne, S. (2025). Hepatitis C and Homelessness: Pathways to Elimination in NSW. UNSW. https://unsworks.unsw.edu.au
[8] Australian Bureau of Statistics. (2023). Estimating Homelessness. https://www.abs.gov.au/statistics/people/housing/estimating-homelessness-census/latest-release
[9] Australian Bureau of Statistics. (2023). Estimating Homelessness. https://www.abs.gov.au/statistics/people/housing/estimating-homelessness-census/latest-release
[10] Australian Bureau of Statistics. (2023). Estimating Homelessness. https://www.abs.gov.au/statistics/people/housing/estimating-homelessness-census/latest-release

However, the number is certainly much higher given the numbers of people not recorded as "no fixed address" and the increasing impact of a tight rental market.

7. Regulations That Are Unnecessarily Obstructive

There are regulatory obstacles with Lydia's Legacy Southern Highlands Homelessness moving forward that the Select Committee may be able to remedy.

A. S 77 Local Government (manufactured Home Estates, Caravan Parks, Camping Grounds and Moveable Dwellings) Regulation 2021

Section 77(1) exempts a Development Application (DA) if:

(a) 2 tiny homes are not occupied for

(i) More than 2 consecutive days, and

(ii) More than 60 days in a 12 month period.

On a 5 acre property, the rationale that 2 tiny homes cannot be occupied for more than 2 consecutive days, or 60 days in a year is bewildering.

This unnecessary and obstructive regulation of requiring a DA serves no tangible purpose.

A tiny home is a structure that is already built. It is on wheels. It meets the requirements for registration under the *Road Transport Act 2013*.

A DA, as the name implies is for development to be carried out. A tiny home has already been developed – it is complete and finalised.

This unnecessary regulation is hindering tiny homes for the homeless being placed on properties. The Wingecarribee Shire Council, the Council for the Southern Highlands, has the slowest DA processing rate in NSW.

A DA for 2 tiny homes, on a 5 acre property, could take more than 2 years before being told that the application is unsuccessful.

Suggestion: That section 77(1)(a) be removed.

Section 77(1)(b) exempts a Development Application (DA) if:

(i) the tiny home is occupied 'by the owner or members of the owner's household…

Again, this unnecessary and obstructive regulatory requirement serves no purpose.

If the landowner has purchased the tiny home, then who stays in it should have no bearing as to whether a DA is required. It makes no sense.

Suggestion: That section 77(1)(b) be removed.

Section 77(1)(c) exempts a Development Application (DA) if the tiny home is 'merely occupied seasonally…in pastoral or agricultural operations…'

Once again, this unnecessary and obstructive regulatory requirement serves no purpose.

If the landowner has purchased the tiny home, then who stays in it should have no bearing as to whether a DA is required.

Suggestion: That section 77(1)(c) be removed.

Section 77(1)(d) exempts a Development Application (DA) if the tiny home is occupied by a displaced person as a result of a natural disaster, and has to be removed within 2 years after installation.

Once again, this unnecessary and obstructive regulatory requirement serves no purpose.

If the landowner has purchased the tiny home, then who stays in it should have no bearing as to whether a DA is required.

Suggestion: That section 77(1)(d) be removed.

B. **Other Regulations**

This submission respectfully requests that the Select Committee examine the following legislation for the purpose of removing any barriers for tiny homes to be placed on 5 acre properties for the medium to long-term accommodation of the homeless:

Wingecarribee Local Environmental Plan 2010

Development Control Plans

State Environmental Planning Policy (Housing) 2021

Local Government Act 1993 - Section 68

Environmental Planning and Assessment Act 1979.

Zoning requirements.