

Productivity Commission National Housing and Homelessness Agreement Review Issues Paper

Submission

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Background

The Queensland Family and Child Commission (QFCC) welcomes the opportunity to provide a submission to the Productivity Commission in response to the *National Housing and Homelessness Agreement Review Issues Paper* (the Issues Paper).

The QFCC is a statutory authority of the Queensland Government responsible for promoting the safety, wellbeing and best interests of children and young people.¹ This includes advocating for the voices of children to be heard and their views to be taken into consideration in all decisions affecting them.²

Under the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC), the Australia government has responsibility to make sure the needs of children are appropriately responded to. This includes recognising a child's right to an adequate standard of living and the provision of housing assistance and support.³

The QFCC is aware housing and homelessness issues can impact children, young people and their families in a number of ways, including the availability of accommodation for young people leaving out of home care and the ability to access safe crisis accommodation for parents and children escaping domestic and family violence.

During the QFCC's discussions with children and young people aged between 13 and 18 years in the preparation of the report *Voices of hope: Growing up in Queensland 2020*, issues regarding affordable housing and support when transitioning to independent living were raised.⁴

The children and young people who raised these issues told the QFCC they want leaders to take more action to provide affordable housing and to better support young people under 18 years who have moved out.⁵

The QFCC welcomes funding allocations and services agreements which improve access to affordable housing for children, young people and their families in Queensland.

¹ *Family and Child Commission Act 2014* (Qld), s.4.

² United Nations 1989, *Convention on the Rights of the Child*, Article 12 accessed 13 January 2022
<https://www.ohchr.org/en/professionalinterest/pages/crc.aspx>

³ United Nations 1989, *Convention on the Rights of the Child*, Articles 27(1) and 27(3) accessed 13 January 2022
<https://www.ohchr.org/en/professionalinterest/pages/crc.aspx>

⁴ Queensland Family and Child Commission 2020, *Growing up in Queensland*, data [unpublished]

⁵ Queensland Family and Child Commission 2020, *Growing up in Queensland*, data [unpublished]

Children, young people and their families

The QFCC is concerned about the number of children, young people and their families experiencing or at risk of homelessness, as well as those unable to access affordable housing.

In Queensland during 2020-21, the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW) reported 5,553 young people aged between 15 and 24 years received support from specialist homelessness services.⁶ Many of these children are seeking support independently from family – around Australia, more than 10,000 children aged between 15 and 17 presented alone to receive support from specialist homelessness services.⁷

Some cohorts of children and young people are at particular risk of requiring homelessness support. According to the AIHW, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children aged 0-14 years in Australia were more likely than non-Indigenous children to receive assistance through homeless services.⁸ Research from the CREATE Foundation found that up to 1 in 3 young people are homeless in the first year after leaving out of home care.⁹

In the Queensland Council of Social Service (QCOS) report *Living Affordability in Queensland: Impacts of financial hardship*, housing was identified as the largest expense for all households and that single and two parent households with two dependents were unable to meet a basic standard of living.¹⁰

QCOS also reported that Queenslanders in need of social housing are waiting in excess of 28 months due to low vacancy rates and high interstate migration, resulting in families sleeping in their cars and tents.¹¹

NHHA intersection with other policies, agreements and strategies

The Issues Paper references the intersection of housing policy with other policy areas including health, aged care, justice and disability.¹² Specific references are made to the *National Agreement on Closing the Gap* and *Australia's Disability Strategy* in the Issues Paper.

The QFCC encourages the Productivity Commission to incorporate Australia's obligations under the UNCRC with respect to Article 27 regarding living standards and housing in the next NHHA, noting the inclusion of children and young people as a priority homelessness cohort.

The Productivity Commission should also consider the Department of Social Services *Safe and Supported: the National Framework for Protecting Australia's Children 2021-2031*, including the *National Standards for Out-of-*

⁶ Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, *Specialist homelessness services annual report 2020-21*, 2021, p.60 accessed 18 February 2022 <https://www.aihw.gov.au/reports/homelessness-services/specialist-homelessness-services-annual-report/contents/young-people-presenting-alone>

⁷ Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, *Specialist homelessness services annual report 2020-21*, 2021, p.60 accessed 18 February 2022 <https://www.aihw.gov.au/reports/homelessness-services/specialist-homelessness-services-annual-report/contents/young-people-presenting-alone>

⁸ Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, *Australia's Children*, 25 February 2022, p.299 accessed 2 March 2022 <https://www.aihw.gov.au/reports/children-youth/australias-children/contents/about>

⁹ McDowall JJ, 'Experiences of homelessness by care leavers in Australia', *Parity*, cited in Queensland Family and Child Commission, *Youth homelessness: Rates of homelessness among young people in Queensland*, March 2018, accessed 15 March 2022 <https://www.qfcc.qld.gov.au/sites/default/files/For%20professionals/research/research-summaries/research-summary-youth-homelessness-frequency.pdf>

¹⁰ Queensland Council of Social Service, *Living Affordability in Queensland: Impacts of financial hardship*, September 2021, p.4 and 8 accessed 2 March 2022 <https://www.qcoss.org.au/publication/report-living-affordability-in-queensland-2021/>

¹¹ Queensland Council of Social Service, *Social housing pressure explodes*, 22 September 2021, accessed 2 March 2022 <https://www.qcoss.org.au/social-housing-pressure-explodes/>

¹² Productivity Commission, *National Housing and Homelessness Agreement Review Issues Paper* p.13.

home Care, and the draft *National Plan to End Violence against Women and their Children 2022-2032*, which outline the risk factors associated with housing stressors, the benefit of a whole-of-government approach which addresses housing issues and an increase in the supply of affordable housing.¹³

Effectiveness of the homelessness service system

The Issues Paper acknowledges that children and young people, and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, are more likely to experience homelessness than the general population.¹⁴ The effectiveness of the homelessness service system delivered in Queensland varies between these cohorts.

The QFCC understands that since 2018 the NHA have funded the delivery of housing services in Queensland, committing approximately \$1.6 billion over five years.¹⁵ Queensland has benefited from funding of \$327.6 million in the 2021-22 financial year to provide services to children, young people and their families.¹⁶

However, the funding provided through NHA to deliver the Youth Housing and Reintegration Service (YHARS) only provides accommodation to young people aged 15-21 years.¹⁷ This leaves a service gap for young people aged below 15 years who are homeless or self-placing and do not meet the current Australian Government criteria for independent living.¹⁸

The Productivity Commission should consider ways to enhance accommodation services for the priority homelessness cohort, particularly those children and young people who are aged under 16 years and leaving care or detention, to address this service gap.

NHA alignment with the *National Agreement on Closing the Gap*

The Issues Paper acknowledges Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people experience poorer housing outcomes across the housing spectrum.¹⁹

The *National Agreement on Closing the Gap* sets targets which intersect with children and young people, a priority homelessness cohort.²⁰ The Productivity Commission should consider the NHA's alignment with the *Closing the Gap* targets, particularly those impacting the lives of children and young people.

¹³ Department of Social Services, *Safe and Supported: the National Framework for Protecting Australia's Children 2021-2031*, p.37 and 41 accessed 14 March 2022 https://www.dss.gov.au/sites/default/files/documents/12_2021/dess5016-national-framework-protecting-childrenaccessible.pdf; Department of Social Services, *The National Plan to Reduce Violence against Women and their Children 2010-2022*, p.8 accessed 14 March 2022 https://www.dss.gov.au/sites/default/files/documents/08_2014/national_plan1.pdf

¹⁴ Productivity Commission, *National Housing and Homelessness Agreement Review Issues Paper* p.16.

¹⁵ Department of Communities, Housing and Digital Economy, *National and state housing agreements and reports*, 19 November 2020 accessed 15 March 2022 <https://www.chde.qld.gov.au/news-publications/finance/national-housing-agreements>

¹⁶ Parliament of Australia, *Budget 2020-2021: Budget Paper No. 3: Affordable housing*, p.41 accessed 15 March 2022 https://parlinfo.aph.gov.au/parlInfo/search/display/display.w3p;query=Id%3A%22library%2Fbudget%2F2020_25%22;src1=sm1

¹⁷ Queensland Family and Child Commission, *Changing the Sentence: Overseeing Queensland's youth justice reforms* p.99 accessed 24 January 2022 <https://www.qfcc.qld.gov.au/sites/default/files/2021-06/QFCC%20Changing%20the%20Sentence%20lo%20res%20spreads.pdf>

¹⁸ Queensland Family and Child Commission, *Changing the Sentence: Overseeing Queensland's youth justice reforms* p.85 accessed 24 January 2022 <https://www.qfcc.qld.gov.au/sites/default/files/2021-06/QFCC%20Changing%20the%20Sentence%20lo%20res%20spreads.pdf>

¹⁹ Productivity Commission, *National Housing and Homelessness Agreement Review Issues Paper* p.28-30.

²⁰ National Agreement on Closing the Gap, *Closing the Gap Targets and Outcomes*, Targets 9, 11, 12, 13, 14 accessed 13 January 2022 <https://www.closingthegap.gov.au/national-agreement/targets#:~:text=The%20National%20Agreement%20on%20Closing%20the%20Gap%20%28the,contributing%20to%20progress%20over%20the%20next%20ten%20years>



Target 17 of the *National Agreement on Closing the Gap* seeks an outcome where Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people have access to information and services enabling participation in informed decision-making regarding their own lives.²¹

The QFCC believes any services offered must be culturally safe and delivered within a framework of self-determination. Therefore, the QFCC supports a consultative and collaborative co-design approach between the Commonwealth and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in the development of the next NHHA.

The Productivity Commission should consider funding and service delivery arrangements which empower Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander housing entities to directly address the support needs of their community.

Sustainable housing

Environmental sustainability

The Issues Paper states the objective of the NHHA is ‘to contributing to improving access to affordable, safe and sustainable housing’.²² Sustainable housing is noted to include ‘environmental sustainability – the degree to which housing design, construction and materials support habitability now and in the future’.²³ However, there is no further reference to environmental sustainability in the Paper.

When speaking to children and young people for our report, *Voices of Hope: Growing up in Queensland 2020*, they told the QFCC that the environment is an issue of great concern.²⁴ They want to see more sustainable practices and less habitat destruction.²⁵ One child told the QFCC their hope for the future was that ‘the rainforests in tropical Queensland will not be cut down to make room for more houses...we all need to help save the rainforests’.²⁶

The QFCC encourages the Productivity Commission to further develop the environmental sustainability aspect of the NHHA’s objective. Based on the views of children and young people provided to the QFCC, consideration should be given to the conservation of the natural environment, and to the sustainability structure of housing where the physical environment incorporates a sustainable and environment-friendly lifestyle with strong transport links, including the ability to safely walk or cycle to amenities.

Poverty

Australia has adopted the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals, the first of which is to ‘end poverty in all its forms everywhere by 2030’.²⁷

²¹ National Agreement on Closing the Gap, *Closing the Gap Targets and Outcomes*, Targets 17 accessed 13 January 2022 <https://www.closingthegap.gov.au/national-agreement/targets#:~:text=The%20National%20Agreement%20on%20Closing%20the%20Gap%20%28the,contributing%20to%20progress%20over%20the%20next%20ten%20years.>

²² Productivity Commission, *National Housing and Homelessness Agreement Review Issues Paper* p.5.

²³ Productivity Commission, *National Housing and Homelessness Agreement Review Issues Paper* p.5.

²⁴ Queensland Family and Child Commission, *Growing up In Queensland 2020: Environment* accessed 13 January 2022

https://www.qfcc.qld.gov.au/sites/default/files/2021-05/GUIQ2020%20Environment%20Infographic_.pdf

²⁵ Queensland Family and Child Commission, *Voices of hope: Growing up in Queensland 2020* p.41, 47-48 accessed 13 January 2022

https://www.qfcc.qld.gov.au/sites/default/files/2021-05/GUIQ%20report_2020_Digital.pdf; Queensland Family and Child Commission, *Growing Up In Queensland 2020: Environment* accessed 13 January 2022 https://www.qfcc.qld.gov.au/sites/default/files/2021-05/GUIQ2020%20Environment%20Infographic_.pdf

²⁶ Queensland Family and Child Commission, *Voices of hope: Growing up in Queensland 2020* p.26 accessed 13 January 2022

https://www.qfcc.qld.gov.au/sites/default/files/2021-05/GUIQ%20report_2020_Digital.pdf

²⁷ United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, *Transforming our world: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development*, accessed 15 March 2022 <https://sdgs.un.org/2030agenda>



The OECD defines poverty at the household level. An individual household is considered to be living in poverty if its income is less than one half of the median disposable income.²⁸ Using this definition and data from the 2016 Census, the National Centre for Social and Economic Modelling reported 15.7 per cent of Queensland children lived in poverty, just below the national average of 17.2 per cent.²⁹

Poverty and financial stress are leading causes of homelessness and overcrowded housing, which can lead to unsafe living environments for children. In Queensland in 2016, 2,979 children under 12, and a further 1,710 children aged 12 to 18, were homeless.³⁰

Childhood poverty has long term health impacts. Adult conditions such as coronary heart disease and diabetes are now being linked to pathways that originated prior to or during a child's first 1,000 days.³¹ Illnesses such as rheumatic heart disease and rheumatic fever were largely eliminated through housing and medical service improvements in the second half of the twentieth century, however these conditions are still prevalent in remote communities, resulting in the deaths of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children.³²

Improvement in health outcomes and reduction of infection for children, young people and their families can be achieved through adequate housing design and infrastructure to support all members of the household.³³

The QFCC continues to have an interest in the impacts of housing accessibility, affordability and homelessness on the rights of children and their families. We will continue to raise awareness, advocate and seek accountability from government to make sure children, young people and their families have access to appropriate accommodation.

We appreciate the opportunity to take part in this process and would be happy to provide more information.

²⁸ Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, *Poverty Rates*, accessed 15 March 2022

<https://data.oecd.org/inequality/poverty-rate.htm>

²⁹ National Centre for Social and Economic Modelling, *Child Social Exclusion, Poverty and Disadvantage in Australia*, accessed 15 March 2022 https://unitingcare.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2019/07/Child_Social_Exclusion_Poverty_and_Disadvantage_in_Australia_Report-1.pdf

³⁰ Australian Bureau of Statistics, *Census of Population and Housing: Estimating homelessness, Table 4.4 Homeless Operational Groups and Other Marginal Housing, Queensland – Sex by age of person – 2016* accessed 15 March 2022

https://www.abs.gov.au/statistics/people/housing/census-population-and-housing-estimating-homelessness/2016/20490do004_2016.xls

³¹ Australian Research Alliance for Children and Youth, *To have and to have not: Measuring child deprivation and opportunity in Australia*, 2019, p.7 accessed 15 March 2022 [https://www.aracy.org.au/publications-resources/command/download_file/id/383/filename/Summary_Report_-_To_have_and_to_have_not_\(192dpi\).pdf](https://www.aracy.org.au/publications-resources/command/download_file/id/383/filename/Summary_Report_-_To_have_and_to_have_not_(192dpi).pdf)

³² Paediatric cardiologist Bo Remenyi and Paediatric Infectious Disease Specialist Professor Jonathan Carapetis cited in Four Corners, *Heart Failure: An investigation into the hidden killer in remote Australian communities*, 10 March 2022 accessed 15 March 2022 <https://www.abc.net.au/4corners/heart-failure:-an-investigation-into-the-hidden/13787308>

³³ END RHD Centre of Research Excellence, *The RHD Endgame Strategy: Evidence Brief #3 Considerations for a comprehensive remote housing strategy*, November 2020, accessed 15 March 2022 <https://endrhd.telethonkids.org.au/siteassets/media-docs---end-rhd/endgame/evidence-briefs/rhd-endgame-strategy-evidence-brief---comprehensive-housing-strategy.pdf>; Healthabitat, *Safety and the 9 Health Living Practices*, accessed 15 March 2022 <https://www.healthabitat.com/what-we-do/safety-and-the-9-healthy-living-practices/>