

The Importance of Minimising Housing Stress and Creating An Economically Efficient Housing System

Submission to the Productivity Commission Review of the National Housing and Homelessness Agreement 2022

The issues of housing stress and homelessness have impacted every facet of my life in ways that have, at times, been beyond my understanding, let alone control. When you are in housing stress or you are at risk of or experiencing homelessness, you are in fight or flight/survival mode and you simply cannot be productive or participate within society to your full capability. Every ounce of your energy is spent just trying to get through the day.

I was homeless from age 14-22. Then, I lived in unsafe housing, as per the definition listed in Box 2 of the Issues Paper released by the Productivity Commission¹, from 22 years of age until March 2019, when I was 45 years old. The impact of this on my life from an economic, productivity and participation standpoint has been catastrophic.

A person's basic need for appropriate and affordable long term housing sits at the intersection of economic and social policy. Yet a lot of the policies we have in place are there because it is predominantly seen as a social issue. My aim with this submission is to take a step back from that and look at the issue from an economic lens, using my life experiences as a reference point.

As you read this, I ask you to examine my life and the expenditure by the Government from an investment and cost/benefit analysis perspective. ***I ask you to please view me as a commodity and not as a person.*** When you do this, you will see clearly the economic and productivity inefficiency that has marked my life to date, in spite of how much Government money has been spent supporting me, and how hard I've worked to change my circumstances.

I would ask you to apply Risk Management principles to these experiences to see what could have been done differently from a Government perspective at various points to prevent some of the spending inefficiency whilst increasing my economic productivity and participation levels - both saving the Government money and making the Government money. .

My submission will read as follows:

- 1. My Story**
 - a. Part 1 - What led me to become homeless at age 14 and was unpreventable from a Government perspective**
 - b. Part 2 - What happened after I became homeless and I believe was preventable from a Government perspective**
- 2. The benefits of policies/strategies that minimise the impact of housing stress in the next National Housing and Homelessness Agreement (NHHA)**
- 3. Addressing economic inefficiencies related to housing and homelessness**
- 4. What I believe the next National Housing and Homelessness Agreement (NHHA) should include**
 - a. National Housing Strategy**

¹ <https://www.pc.gov.au/inquiries/current/housing-homelessness/issues>

b. Introduction to the National Affordable Housing Alliance (NAHA) Policy Options

5. Summary

So who am I? I was one of the 100 homeless young people who testified at the Burdekin Royal Commission into Youth Homelessness in the late 1980's. There is an unconfirmed yet highly plausible belief that of the other 99 young people who testified at the Royal Commission, somewhere between 60-80 are dead. I'm the only one who's come forward thus far and by default, that makes me the poster child for the Royal Commission, yet when you look at my life with an economic lens, you will see that I'm far from being that. In fact, if we were to line up my experiences, we could probably create a "How Not To Do" guide for economic and social policy for Governments to use going forward

In this submission I will share my life story; what led me to become homeless at age 14; what happened after I became homeless; what has helped me become more productive than ever before and; how this helps me see so clearly the change that is needed. Through dissecting my life experiences and interweaving them with economic and policy data, I'm hoping to create a compelling argument for the next National Housing and Homelessness Agreement (NHHA) to include strategies that bring all levels of Government together and have them moving in a uniform, strategic and cohesive way to minimise the risk of people living in housing stress.

This is the first time I'm sharing quite a bit of the details surrounding what I have been through because, whilst I've made peace with it all, that doesn't mean that I want to talk about it, let alone put it on the public record like this. However, I believe now is the time for me to share these details to create a greater understanding of the critical change that is necessary in the next National Housing and Homelessness Agreement (NHHA).

1. My story:

a. Part 1 - What led me to become homeless at age 14 and was unpreventable from a Government perspective

- At the age of 4, I endured brutal and continuous sexual violence at the hands of two men over a two week period. My mind blocked most of the memories of these incidents out until recently so I could function. One of these men was known to my family and he 'presented' me to the second man as a 'prize catch'. These men did things to me that were so horrific that it isn't surprising that my brain blocked them out for 44 years. They acted separately but both knew what the other was doing. One acted during the day and the other at night. At one point, the second man, whom I could only describe as being 'pure evil', held a knife to my throat and threatened to kill me if I told anyone what they were doing to me.
- At age 8, I was molested again, this time by a third man who was also known to my family. These acts weren't as violent as the first acts of sexual violence were but I was preyed upon and groomed by this man because of how vulnerable I was emotionally as a result of those first acts.
- My childhood home was far from ideal. I'm from your average middle class family but one of my parents was extremely toxic and abusive. This abusive situation was made worse because I was an extremely traumatised little girl. Because my behaviour was bad as a consequence of the sexual violence, instead of trying to work out why I was acting the way I was, this parent saw me, and my behaviour, as an imposition on them and their lifestyle and I was continuously punished accordingly. Government authorities first became involved with my family when I was 7 and they did what they could to help protect me within that situation but, as it stood within the system back then, there were limits to what they could do.

The combination of these 3 things had a truly catastrophic impact on my life, so much so that the first time I tried killing myself was at age 7.

When it comes to the sexual violence I endured at the hands of those 3 men from a Government perspective, I know it was unpreventable. Had anyone anywhere in any level of Government known what those men were doing to me, I know without a shadow of a doubt authorities would have swooped in and rescued me straight away. But no-one knew, not even my parents, so nothing could be done. Without the movement towards sexual violence education and prevention campaigns that are thankfully starting to happen now, it was unpreventable.

When it came to the authorities' involvement with my family, those we dealt with did all they could to help and support my family and I, but the limitations placed upon such authorities working with families like mine meant that only so much could be done without breaking laws. Working within those bounds, from a Government perspective, again what happened was unpreventable.

b. Part 2 - What happened after I became homeless and I believe was preventable from a Government perspective

- I mostly couch surfed when I was homeless, never really knowing when I woke up in the morning where I would sleep that night. Back in the late '80's, there were only a few short-term youth refuges but I purposely avoided going to certain ones where I knew drug use was rife because I had decided that I would not take drugs and did not want that resolve to diminish. Social housing was an option that was presented to me a few times, but in the type of social housing back then drug use was also rife, so I declined that option. Homelessness caused more trauma in and of itself, on top of the trauma I already carried with me.
- At 22, I moved into a house with a lady, her 4 kids and 5 boarders. It was loud and endlessly busy but I loved being there. About 60% of my income was spent on rent and food but I had a bed, a bedroom and a wardrobe with clothes in it. For the next few years, I was all over the place as I tried to process what I had gone on earlier in my life.
- I was then able to get a job as a waitress. This meant I was on a low wage and beholden to a mostly casualised and seasonal workflow. I typically paid a large amount of my wages on rent, which then left me limited financially in terms of what I could do and what I could buy. I made do, though. I had a roof over my head, clothes on my back and I ate at work most days. I attempted to do a few HSC subjects, but it was hard juggling that with shift work. This meant I could not really progress in terms of education and career options.
- In 2003, I moved to one of NSW's peak hospitality/tourist areas for greater work options, and it is here that I have made my home. No-one knew my background until very recently, but I have found a community that has accepted me for who I am. The most amazing thing has been the incredible role models I've been surrounded by within this community. As I have gotten to know them and their families, I have watched and learned. They have inspired me to become who I am today, because I have wanted nothing more than to be like them. The most growth I've had as a person has been since I've been a part of this community. To stay here, however, I have had to pay at least 50% of my wage on accommodation. I've done so willingly to remain surrounded by these incredible role models.
- In my mid thirties, I got a job as an office junior with a 'proper salary' and I met the father of my children. Unfortunately, because again, there was a pretty low bar already set in terms of how I was used to being treated, my choice of marriage partner wasn't the best. At age 45, due to domestic violence, my children and I were left at risk of homelessness. I had to fight the biggest fight of my life to stay amongst these people who really are my backbone.
- I'm 48 and with no strong fallback position in terms of an education or career, I'm now staring down the barrel of becoming one of the 'Over 55' women going into their retirement with nothing. I might end up at risk of becoming homeless yet again.

So how do I think these things I've just listed could have been prevented? It's through the provision of appropriate and affordable long term housing. ***What went on in my childhood home and the sexual violence I experienced were the things that derailed my life's***

trajectory. The lack of appropriate and affordable long-term housing is what has prevented me from getting it back on track.

2. The benefits of introducing policies that minimise the impact of housing stress in the next National Housing and Homelessness Agreement (NHHA)

The greatest impact being in fight/or flight mode has on someone is their productivity and participation. If you are constantly worried about how you are going to keep a roof over your head or where you are going to be living in two weeks or two months, you simply cannot be productive or participate within our society properly. It takes every ounce of energy you have to just get through the day.

When the Covid-19 global pandemic first hit us here in Australia and we went into the first lockdown, do you remember how worried you were that you or your family would get sick? And if you did, how sick would you get? Do you remember how worried you were about keeping your job if the economy tanked completely?

Do you remember how your brain didn't stop racing all day, every day? Do you remember how it was so hard concentrating on anything? How even the most basic tasks seemed so much harder to get done than usual? How a lot of things just didn't get done yet at the end of the day, you were completely exhausted? And even though you were exhausted, you couldn't sleep because your mind was racing at a bazillion miles an hour?

That's how you feel when you are in housing stress. All day, every day. You can't be productive nor participate within our economy and society when you are in that state. *Could you yourself be as productive if you felt that way all day, every day?*

The impact of housing stress is preventable from a Government perspective. People who are in housing stress function, at best, at their minimum capability/potential and, at worst, well below their minimum capability/potential. The impact this is going to have on our economy and within our society is not insignificant and I believe it is preventable from a Government perspective.

This assertion is backed up by Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs (see below diagram) which shows that the two foundation needs, the physiological and safety needs, are both found primarily through the provision of appropriate and affordable long term housing. Without this, a person will simply be unable to achieve self actualisation, which could be equated with maximum potential, or in economic terms, peak productivity.



Research conducted by Professor Bill Randolph and William Thackway from the City Futures Research Institute August, 2021² found that:

“...financial stress rates had risen steeply after 2017 for both renters and mortgagors but plateaued until the outbreak of the pandemic in early 2020 when it ticked up sharply, initially for mortgagors and then for renters, to the point where both tenure groups were facing comparable rates. By August 2021 the stress rates had reached 42% for mortgagors and 38% for renters (Thackway & Randolph, 2021³). For mortgagors this figure is almost four times the level recorded in 2000 and has risen in the context of a parallel increase in overall household debt to income ratios over this time, with only the aftermath of the GFC providing a temporary respite. But for renters, the current stress figure is six times the level recorded in 2000.”

Put simply, this means 42% of mortgage holders and 38% of renters are in fight or flight/survival mode all day every day and are not functioning to their maximum potential within our economy. That equates to 2 in 5 Australian households, which is a staggering number when you consider the overall productivity loss that could create. With net overseas migration resuming, which is expected to place more demand on the housing market (particularly the rental market), which will inevitably drive up house prices and rents, the number of households experiencing housing stress is only going to rise.

This is something we should be really concerned about, particularly considering the loss of productivity the Federal Treasury predicted in their 2021 Intergenerational Report⁴:

“The falling old-age dependency ratio presents challenges for Australia’s long-term economic growth and fiscal outlook. A working-age person’s taxes will be required to support a greater number of people aged over 65. A larger older population will require greater government spending in healthcare, the Age Pension and end-of-life support, and has implications for participation and productivity growth. As the population continues to age and adds pressure to the budget, government policy will need to adapt and foster economic growth to overcome these fiscal challenges.”

Further:

“The ratio of working-age people to those over 65 is known as the old-age dependency ratio. In 1981-82, for every person aged over 65, there were 6.6 working-age people. In 2019-20, for every person aged over 65, there were 4.0 working-age people. This ratio is projected to fall further – by 2060-61, for every person aged over 65, there will only be 2.7 working-age people. The rapid decline in the old-age dependency ratio between 2010-11 and 2029-30 is largely due to the baby boomer generation reaching age 65. The ratio continues to decline from the mid-2030s after this transition is complete, but does so less rapidly than before.”

Both of these points state clearly that we are expecting a much smaller number of people in the workforce to sustain a much greater number of people and their dependency on our health and welfare systems over the next 40 years. ***There can be no greater argument than this to show that we are going to need our workforce to be functioning at its maximum potential***

²

<https://blogs.unsw.edu.au/cityfutures/blog/2021/10/challenging-the-notion-of-housing-reform-as-political-suicide-household-financial-stress-analysis-of-australian-political-constituencies/>

³ https://cityfutures.be.unsw.edu.au/documents/660/Housing_Financial_Stress_and_Electoral_Geography_Report_FINAL_V4.pdf.

⁴ https://treasury.gov.au/sites/default/files/2021-06/p2021_182464.pdf

productivity level over the next 40 years. We will need to see considerable economic growth at a time when our productivity levels are dropping⁵.

We are placing an expectation upon a generation to work harder than others have previously in order to maintain services for even more people in their retirement whilst a high percentage of them are in housing stress and are struggling to get through each day. ***Yet based on the current level of households experiencing housing stress, we could have a ratio of 1.6 out of the 2019-2020 old-age dependency ratio of 4.0 not functioning at its maximum productivity level. This means that due to housing stress, it's quite plausible that our current old-age dependency ratio could be a lot lower than what is stated in the Intergenerational Report⁶.***

I say what I have said to you not as an economist or academic. I say it because I lived in housing stress - for decades. I see so clearly now that it has not just impacted upon, but has actually completely decimated my ability to work to my maximum productivity level until recently because I have spent all day, every day in fight or flight/survival mode.

I will give you a clear example of what I mean by this. Just four years ago, I would not have been able to write something like this submission. I would not have had the mental capacity, let alone have been able to use my intellect, my lateral and critical thinking as well as my emotional intelligence in this way. I was constantly stressed, exhausted and barely had enough bandwidth to get through each day, let alone stretch myself to do more. But it was my normal. It was all I had ever known. However, now that I'm not in housing stress for the first time ever, I recognise how different life is for me and, more importantly, how different I am as a person.

I will be really transparent with you and say that it wasn't until I wrote my submission⁷ to the Federal Government Parliamentary Inquiry into Housing Affordability and Supply in September 2022 that I realised how intelligent I am. I mean, I knew I was intelligent but I had no context for it. I have never had an opportunity to see what it is that my intelligence can do before.

I also didn't realise that intelligence, as well as my emotional intelligence, lateral and critical thinking, meant that I could connect data and policy points in ways that they might not have been connected before. I'm 48 years old and I'm only just learning what it is that I can do. It honestly feels incredible taking my brain out for a walk like this but the only reason I'm able to do it is because I'm not in housing stress.

I can only write this submission because I'm not in fight or flight/survival mode anymore.

As a nation, we need to keep our current and future age dependency ratio at a level where it can sustain our economy and society. If the next National Housing and Homelessness Agreement (NHHA) included policies that enabled us to minimise housing stress, it would present us with a great opportunity to do that. From the perspective of the Federal, State and Territory Governments, the potential gains in terms of extra productivity coming from our workforce will benefit our economy and society immensely. This makes having each jurisdiction actively engaged with the issue more than worthwhile.

⁵ <https://www.afr.com/policy/economy/glass-half-full-says-frydenberg-s-intergenerational-report-20210628-p584wu>

⁶ https://treasury.gov.au/sites/default/files/2021-06/p2021_182464.pdf

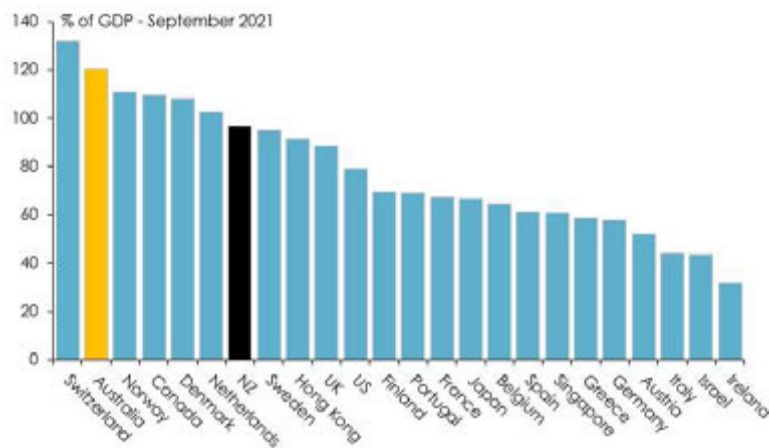
⁷ <https://lnkd.in/gpubQJqc>

Based on my own experiences, if this submission is what the 48 year old ex street kid who didn't even finish high school can do because she's not in housing stress for the first time in her life, then we clearly have significant productivity as well as potential already available to us that can be unlocked through policies that minimise the impact of housing stress to the benefit of all Australians.

Whilst it is much harder for the Government to manage housing stress for homeowners, the impacts of it are just as catastrophic. In a speech on Wednesday 9 March, 2022 at the Australian Financial Review Business Summit, the Reserve Bank Governor Philip Lowe said the following⁸:

“Given the outlook, though, it is plausible that the cash rate will be increased later this year.”

Economists are predicting we have at least one, if not more, interest rate rise on the way in 2022, yet Bank of International Settlements figures released for the September 2021 quarter show that Australia’s household debt ratio when measured against our Gross Domestic Product (GDP) is second highest in the world⁹.



This does not bode well for us when it comes to the loss of productivity that occurs when people are in housing stress. Most of the home owners in our current workforce are the ones who are paying mortgages, and with house prices rising 25.3% in 2021, larger loans have needed to be taken out. When interest rates rise and those mortgage repayments increase, we will most likely end up with more than the 2 in 5 households experiencing housing stress that we currently have.

I know I’m not stating things that aren’t already well known when it comes to rate rises and household debt as well as housing affordability. The National Housing and Finance Investment Corporation (NHFIC) State of Housing Affordability covers a lot of this in their State of Housing Affordability report¹⁰ and this information is widely available elsewhere. However, because I know more than most people just how detrimental housing stress can be on a person and their productivity and participation, these figures really do concern me, especially when they are placed alongside productivity data like the old-age dependency ratio.

⁸ <https://www.rba.gov.au/speeches/2022/sp-gov-2022-03-09.html>

⁹ https://www.bis.org/statistics/totcredit.htm?m=6_380_669

¹⁰ <https://www.nhfc.gov.au/media/1807/state-of-housing-affordability-sotnh22.pdf>

3. Addressing economic inefficiencies related to housing and homelessness

My life is a 'How Not To Do' guide.

When I think back, I don't think it would be a stretch to say I could have had several AUD\$million (possibly \$5-10 million) spent on me by the Government - both State and Federal - since I first hit the system at age 7. This would cover everything - medical care, family counselling and interventions, educational support (when I went to school), housing, Youth and Adolescent services such as refuges and support services, income support, homelessness services, domestic violence support services, Policing, courts costs, Legal Aid, DV Trauma Counselling, Commonwealth Rent Assistance and I could keep going.

Then when you consider I am at risk of becoming one of the 'Over 55' women who enter retirement with not enough savings to sustain them, and a body who has physically endured more than most, I could cost the Government a whole lot more money.

Looking at the money spent on me vs. the return for that money, I can say that what has been spent on me so far has not been one of the best investments the Government has made. From a humanitarian perspective, yes it has been. It has been the basic support expected of a civil society, but looking at it from a purely financial/fiscal perspective, that money could definitely have been better invested/spent.

Instead of short term solutions, had the money been spent on providing me with appropriate and affordable long-term housing (circa AUD\$500,000 - \$1 million) at 17-18, I would have had the security and stability I needed to get my head together and deal with the trauma of my childhood, finish my education, complete tertiary studies, secure employment, and reach my full potential as per Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs.

Say I had gotten that degree and at 48, with a successful career, I would have paid back more than \$500,000 through taxes. Further, I would be stimulating the economy with my spending.

Please know I am genuinely so grateful for the support I have received up until now. *I wholeheartedly believe that I would be dead had I not had it.* However, I see so clearly that a far smaller proportion of that money would have been better spent through providing appropriate and affordable long-term housing, which would then, in turn, have enabled me to give our Government and society a solid return on investment (ROI).

To put it bluntly, I have been a drain on Government revenue. I'm a living example of economic inefficiency and bad investment. It wouldn't have been this way, however, had I been given appropriate and affordable housing long term in the first instance.

It is good fiscal policy to fix something properly the first time rather than 'kick the can' down the road with short-term Band Aid solutions. Unless housing policies are unilaterally put in place at every level of Government, vulnerable people simply will not have the resources within them to reach their full productivity and participation potential.

4. What I believe the next National Housing and Homelessness Agreement (NHHA) should include:

a. A National Housing Strategy

I believe the next National Housing and Homelessness Agreement (NHHA) should include a National Housing Strategy. I understand completely that the Australian Constitution limits what the Commonwealth Government can do in relation to this issue, as housing is, by statute, a State and Territory responsibility, with Local Governments generally controlling planning outcomes. It is a complicated matrix that basically means the Federal Government is left to use its funding levers to deal with Housing and Homelessness matters through the NHHA.

However, after seeing the economic inefficiency that has marked my life, I want to see a housing system that traverses every level of Government in a way that ensures economic efficiency from the Federal Government right through to every Local Government in this country. I acknowledge that it will take considerable work to achieve this but the potential gains, especially from a productivity perspective, will position us as a nation in a way that could offset an even bigger problem in relation to productivity levels and the age-dependency ratio.

It stands to reason that having all levels of Government moving in a uniform, strategic and cohesive way will achieve far greater economic efficiency because there is one framework that operates across every jurisdiction. It would prevent duplication and provide considerable cost savings to the Government. A National Housing Strategy could potentially be formed as an extension of and be implemented through City Deals¹¹ where the specifics of how a certain area implements the framework are relative to the needs of the area, whilst each City Deal is working towards the overarching goal set out by the National Housing Strategy.

In August 2021, the Federal Government's own Parliamentary Inquiry into Homelessness handed down its final report¹² in Parliament in August 2021 which recommended that, in consultation with state, territory and local governments, the Federal Government develop and implement a ten-year national strategy on homelessness using a Housing First model. This must inform the National Housing and Homelessness Agreement (NHHA).

b. Introduction to the National Affordable Housing Alliance (NAHA) Policy Options

The National Affordable Housing Alliance (NAHA) is an alliance of the Housing and Property Peak bodies (Housing Industry Association, National Shelter, Property Council of Australia, Community Housing Industry Association, Master Builders Australia, and Homelessness Australia) as well as the Australian Council of Trade Unions, the Australian Council of Social Services and Industry Super Australia. This Alliance has developed 4 policy options that, if implemented at every level of Government, have the potential to meet the full 819,000 shortfall of social and affordable housing the National Housing Finance and Investment Corporation (NHFIC) has forecast. See **Appendix 1** for further details.

These policy options give the Government a comprehensive roadmap, funding advice and choices. However, these options will **only** work when there is credible Government

¹¹ <https://www.infrastructure.gov.au/territories-regions-cities/cities/city-deals>

¹²

https://www.aph.gov.au/Parliamentary_Business/Committees/House/Social_Policy_and_Legal_Affairs/HomelessnessinAustralia/Report

co-investment in perpetuity and if every level of Government is engaged in and committed to their implementation.

The key point, however, is that the burden of responsibility is not just left to the Government. There are options to unlock Private Sector investment at scale, which is something the Government hasn't had available to them previously. Until now, the burden of responsibility was almost exclusively on the Government.

Further, and specifically in relation to what the Federal Government has responsibility for, policies that enable private sector investment can **only** be implemented at the Federal Government level. They cannot be implemented at a State/Territory or Local Government level. There is an extra benefit to the Federal Government in implementing these policies, though, that I believe makes them well worth being considered.

In February 2022, the Federal Treasurer Josh Frydenburg attended the G20 Finance Ministers and Central Bank Governors Meeting in Jakarta, Indonesia. Among the many topics that were covered at the meeting was one related to the disruption the Covid-19 pandemic has had on Government and Private Sector infrastructure investment. Below is point 8 of the Communique released after the meeting¹³:

*“8. The COVID-19 pandemic has disrupted government and private sector investment into infrastructure. To ensure we recover stronger, we commit to revitalising infrastructure investment in a sustainable, inclusive, accessible and affordable way, in line with the G20 Roadmap to Infrastructure as an Asset Class, the Collaboration with Institutional Investors and Asset Managers on Infrastructure and considering the outcomes of the 2021 G20 Infrastructure Investors Dialogue. **We will develop actions to leverage private sector participation to scale up sustainable infrastructure development, which will complement investment from other sources, including public investment and finance provided by MDBs. We will develop policies to mobilise inclusive infrastructure investment to enhance social inclusion and address subnational disparities in regions and cities.**”*

The National Affordable Housing Alliance (NAHA) Policy Options are geared towards affordable and social housing becoming an infrastructure investment. If the Federal Government were to enable investment from the private sector into affordable and social housing, it would actually assist the Government in meeting its own commitment to the above-mentioned G20 target.

To bring all of this back to my own life experiences, through critical thinking I see so clearly that the National Affordable Housing Alliance (NAHA) Policy Options would have enabled the right infrastructure (read appropriate and affordable long term housing) was in place to support me at that point where what was ‘unpreventable’ for Government clicked over into being ‘preventable’. It would have provided a safety net to help me turn my life around more effectively. And the Government would have saved themselves a whole lot of money.

5. Summary

Homelessness and housing stress are issues that have defined so much of my life thus far, as you have now seen.

¹³ <https://home.treasury.gov/news/press-releases/jy0601>

As I have said previously, what went on in my childhood home and the sexual violence I experienced were the things that derailed my life's trajectory. The lack of appropriate and affordable long-term housing is what has prevented me from getting that trajectory back to where it should be.

Most others who are making submissions to this review have gained their perspectives from economic data, research and public policy. Whilst their submissions are invaluable, I implore you to consider the living, breathing human life - my life - that I've presented here for economic analysis, and how things could have been so different. How things could potentially be so different for millions of households across Australia if we reduce housing stress. And how this will ultimately help all Australians.

When you consider where I am today alongside the outcomes of my peers from the Burdekin Royal Commission into Youth Homelessness 34 years ago, the majority of whom are most likely dead, and because I'm the only one of the 100 to come forward thus far, it means that by default, I'm the poster child of that Royal Commission. I'm a success story! I really have come such a long way comparatively. However, not being dead is probably the lowest bar a person's success could be measured off.

Yet, when you look at me as a commodity or an investment, or from a cost/benefit analysis perspective, you actually clearly see that I'm the furthest from being the 'poster child' of the Royal Commission. I'm the living, breathing, walking, talking example of economic inefficiency.

It does cut deep that I have not been enabled to have the same opportunities as most other people. I will never allow what has happened to define who I am and what I do with my life. I am so genuinely excited about my future now that I'm no longer in housing stress - and I'm seeing just what I'm capable of, but it does cut deep that this is happening decades after it could potentially have happened.

Housing stress and its impact on a person's productivity can be catastrophic, as it has been for me. My experiences serve to illustrate why policies that minimise the risk of people ending up in housing stress should be included in the next National Housing and Homelessness Agreement (NHHA) as part of a National Housing Strategy.

A lot of the work has been done for the Government already through the National Affordable Housing Alliance (NAHA) Policy Options. Their policies will minimise the chance of 819,000 households ending up in housing stress. They have the potential to build the **full shortfall** of 819,000 social and affordable housing the National Housing Finance and Investment Corporation (NHFIC) has forecast.

By implementing them, we have the opportunity to move 819,000 households out of housing stress and into greater productivity and participation and that will **only** be of benefit to our economy and our society. I think that makes them a 'no brainer' for every level of Government here in Australia.

It's time we stopped doing a . One was bad enough.

We can do so much better than a if the next National Housing and Homelessness Agreement includes policies that minimise housing stress and includes a National Housing Strategy that every level of Government is engaged in and on board with.