



## RESPONSE TO PRODUCTIVITY COMMISSION NATIONAL HOUSING & HOMELESSNESS AGREEMENT REVIEW Issues Paper December 2021

BeyondHousing is pleased to have the opportunity to provide input into the Productivity Commission's review of the National Housing & Homelessness Agreement (NHHA). As a provider of both homelessness and community housing services in regional Victoria, we believe that we are well placed to respond to some of the issues raised in the Issues Paper.

As noted in the issues paper, the current NHHA is limited in scope because of its failure to incorporate other Government policies that have a direct impact on peoples' access to housing and homelessness services. As such, we recommend the Federal Government work, in conjunction with State, Territory and local governments, to develop a ten year National Homelessness and Low Income Housing Strategy and Action Plan as part of the next NHHA. In addition to setting targets to reduce (and end) homelessness and encourage the provision of affordable and appropriate housing, a National Strategy will be able to consider those policies that currently sit outside of the NHHA, but which directly impact people's access to housing across Australia eg. income support, taxation policies etc.

The NHHA Priority Policy Areas and Performance Indicators do not appear to align, with little or no mention of homelessness in the policy areas, but with the Performance Indicators measuring aspects of homelessness. There is little mention of those people most at risk in the housing market, except for the performance indicator of increasing the number of Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander people entering home purchase. This would seem to be at odds with the Closing the Gap objective of reducing the number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people living in severely over-crowded conditions.

The notion of a housing spectrum through which people move over their housing career is becoming increasingly unrealistic. As outlined in the issues paper, the private rental market is no longer a medium term option before people move into housing purchase. It is, instead, the only option for many households, providing little security of tenure and at the same time increasing in cost with few minimum standards of quality. A viable social and/or affordable rental housing sector is critical to meet the needs of low income people, particularly those identified in the NHHA as priority cohorts including Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander people, people with a disability, victim survivors of family violence and young people leaving care.

The current NHHA would appear to lack focus or coherence and needs to be redesigned to more broadly capture the need for both a housing and a homelessness strategy, whilst also being the funding framework between the Commonwealth and State/Territory Governments.

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The question is raised in the issues paper of how effective the homelessness sector is, particularly in light of growing numbers of homeless people. However, effective service delivery requires acknowledgement across all tiers of government that homelessness is complex and requires cross sector and cross government responses that include:

- Adequate incomes, particularly for those relying on statutory incomes or with casual work
- A range of service delivery responses that include improved access to crisis accommodation and longer-term accommodation/support that works (and is funded) in conjunction ie HousingFirst model, to address barriers to social inclusion and participation
- Access to affordable long-term housing which is fundamental to preventing recurring homelessness.
- A range of prevention and early intervention programs. These are critical to reducing the inflow of people into the homelessness sector, and importantly, other service sectors including health, justice and mental health. The cost of homelessness on the broader community has been well documented, and a new NHHA is an opportunity to not only address homelessness, but to prevent it.

It is interesting that the Productivity Commission sought responses on the impact of the COVID 19 pandemic on different sectors of the community, particularly homeless people and those in the private rental market. Whilst it is beyond the scope of this organisation to provide a response at a national level, the following were noted:

- The immediate response to COVID 19 of increasing statutory incomes and providing long term crisis accommodation had a positive impact on the homeless people within our region.
- Significant rent increases in the private rental market during the pandemic have placed many households into rental stress, with those on lowest incomes feeling the greatest impact.

The Productivity Commission is to be congratulated for seeking the opinions of those with lived experience of social housing, homelessness, insecure housing etc. However, it should be noted that the consultation period of December 2021 to February 2022 has been very limited. We encourage the Commission to continue to seek to consult with consumers and clients, as well as with those working in the social housing and homelessness sectors, across metropolitan, regional, rural, and remote Australia. This will assist in its evaluation of the current NHHA, with the view to developing a policy and funding framework that will guide the Australian housing market for the next decade.

CELIA ADAMS  
CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER

17 February 2022