



31 March 2020

### **To Whom It May Concern**

Shelter SA is pleased that the Federal Parliament is focussing on homelessness in Australia. The number of people experiencing homelessness and living in unaffordable housing is on the rise and is much too high for a developed nation like Australia. Shelter SA hopes the Inquiry will lead to much-needed action on homelessness and housing affordability.

In the past several weeks, we have seen strong action on homelessness as a result of the coronavirus pandemic. People sleeping rough have been accommodated in motels, and a national moratorium on evictions due to non-payment of rent has been implemented. Australia has realised the importance of keeping people housed and has found the money to do so. We need to continue this approach after the pandemic is over and implement strong and evidence-based measures to prevent and address homelessness.

Improving housing affordability for people living on low incomes is critical. In the latest [National Rental Affordability Index](#), there were no affordable private rental properties available for people receiving Newstart in Adelaide, with some people needing to pay upwards of 75% of their income on rent.

A recent [AHURI report](#) shows a shortage of 212,000 dwellings for households in the lowest income quintile, but this number ballooned out to 305,000 when considering properties occupied by people living on higher incomes. The issue of housing affordability can only be resolved by a significant government investment in [social housing](#). Unfortunately, South Australian public housing stock [has declined significantly](#) over the past 10 years, making it even less available for our most vulnerable citizens. We must urgently reverse this trend and increase the stock of public and community housing for people living on low incomes. The National Rental Affordability Scheme created additional affordability for some households, and we are extremely concerned that it is being discontinued. A similar scheme should commence as soon as possible.

The most common reason given by people falling into homelessness when they access specialist homelessness services is “housing crisis”, pointing to the need to focus on housing as the solution to homelessness. Shelter SA supports the introduction of rental vouchers to help people stay in their housing. Our emergency call data shows that many people reach out for help before they are evicted from private rental or experience homelessness, and this would be an opportune time to introduce a rental voucher program.

A [Housing First](#) approach is widely regarded as best-practice for addressing homelessness. This approach prioritises permanent and stable housing for people experiencing homelessness, which is not conditional on addressing other health and well-being issues. Housing First has been shown to be successful in helping people retain their housing (88% compared to 47% in other programs) and is more cost effective than other strategies. Savings are achieved primarily through reduced time in high-intensity environments such as hospitals and psychiatric care, and reduced contact with the justice system. However, a Housing First approach is difficult to carry out when there is a lack of affordable housing for people living on low incomes, a reminder that addressing housing affordability is an urgent necessity if we are serious about ending homelessness.

The Federal Government must develop a long term housing strategy to guide the policy and funding needed to end homelessness. Funding for specialist homelessness services and housing providers should take a long term view to ensure continuity of service. The funding should also be adequate for the number of people using the services.

Shelter SA has published many reports into homelessness, housing affordability and maintaining tenancies, including the below:

[Rental Discrimination in the Private Rental Market](#)

[Social Landlord Discussion Paper](#)

[Aboriginal Transitions Housing and Support](#)

[Domestic Violence Prevention](#)

[End of the Road for For Profit Rooming Houses](#)

Please contact us if you require any further information and we look forward to hearing about the outcomes and actions of the Inquiry.

**Dr. Alice Clark**