



Statement on the Worsening Rental Crisis in Australia

Dear Chair and Committee Members,

We are a broad and diverse range of organisations, including renting and housing, health, youth and community advocacy organisations, community legal centres, unions and faith based organisations. Our organisations are committed to ensuring better outcomes for people who rent their homes across Australia.

We are jointly submitting this statement to the Senate's inquiry into the Worsening Rental Crisis in Australia to highlight the need for urgent action to address the challenges faced by renters and ensure access to safe, secure, affordable and healthy homes.

We note that in addition to this joint statement, many of our organisations will also be providing separate submissions to contribute their perspectives and insights into the worsening crisis in rental housing.

Background

As ownership has become less and less affordable, a growing number of people are renting, with over 8 million Australians now making homes in the rental sector. Around two in five of these households include dependent children, and a growing number of people are long-term renters who will rent through their entire life, including into retirement. Renting is not a temporary step: it is a way of life for many people whose ability to have a decent home is determined by the conditions in the rental sector.

However, the current state of the rental market is characterised by instability, insecurity, and a lack of adequate protections for renters. Market rents are unaffordable with many renters struggling to secure a new rental property in the fiercely competitive private rental market. Most renters continue to face significant insecurity, making it very difficult to assert their rights such as requesting repairs.

Many rental homes provided are of a poor standard.¹ In addition, the often substantial increases to rent being experienced by many across the country is placing a tremendous burden on individuals and families. Too many renting households are spending too much of their income on rent, leaving very little for other necessary ever-increasing expenses.²

Immediate measures must be taken to address the pressing issues in the private rental market. While long-term solutions such as significantly increasing the proportion of social housing stock and housing supply more broadly are crucial, additional reforms and measures are needed to alleviate the immediate challenges faced by renters.

We collectively bring attention to the need for national, state and territory governments to work together to develop a consultative framework and national plan for rental reform, to deliver meaningful outcomes across all jurisdictions. A national framework and plan will establish a shared set of rights and protections for renters and shared ambition for improvement across the rental housing system, while safeguarding against any regression of rights in any jurisdiction. A national plan should not stop immediate action by states and territories to undertake rental reform.

Priority areas of rental reform

The following priority areas require reform to address the worsening crisis in rental housing:

Greater stability and security for people who rent their homes

Without better protections against no-cause evictions, including at the end of fixed-term leases, renters cannot enforce other rights without fear of reprisal. We recommend the prioritising of reforms to ensure landlords must provide renters with a valid reason for terminating a tenancy to provide better protection against arbitrary and unfair evictions.

Stronger protections and fair limits on rent increases

Reforms are urgently needed to stabilise rent prices. Setting fair limits and stronger protections against excessive rent increases is a crucial, timely intervention that can help address the housing insecurity and financial stress the increased unaffordability of rents is creating.

Safe and healthy homes for renters

Renters have a right to live in a safe, accessible and healthy home that meets a clearly articulated basic minimum standard. This must include basic energy efficiency standards to reduce the energy required to heat or cool a home, and ensure access to an affordable energy supply. Renters must also have the right to modify their home where necessary to ensure it is accessible and they can live safely and independently.

Better enforcement, oversight, and accountability so that compliance is the norm

The current enforcement paradigm relies on renters to enforce the laws – despite having less power and being vulnerable to retaliation through eviction or rent increases. Government agencies should be better resourced to respond to and support tenant self-advocacy, while also pro-actively enforcing rental laws and applying penalties to deter non-compliance. Introduction of landlord registration (or licensing) schemes that provide greater transparency, accountability and data to our renting systems should be considered.

Access to free advice, assistance and advocacy

It is vital renters across Australia have access to high quality tenancy advocacy advice and assistance. Tenancy Advice and Advocacy Services have demonstrated they are effective at sustaining tenancies, reducing evictions directly into homelessness, and reducing debts. Resourcing of services across Australia has not kept pace with the growth in the number of

residential tenancies and the growth in the number of disadvantaged households in the rental market whose tenancies are especially precarious. There is also very limited resourcing provided to housing advocates with experience and expertise in residential tenancy systems to take part in consultation and conversations and ensure renters' voices are heard, in particular at the national level.

Substantial investment in social housing is required from both federal and state governments

Alongside rental reforms, the inquiry should recognise that housing is a complex system with interacting parts. Unaffordable, inadequate housing in the private rental sector puts greater pressure and cost on the social housing and homelessness system. A robust and healthy social housing system likewise eases pressure on the private rental sector. High property prices put pressure on all forms of renting.

We note that Australia's stock of social housing has fallen consistently over preceding decades. Public housing has not been supported by governments. Transfers of property and / or management, and availability of lower cost finance to community housing, does not ensure the number and diversity of social housing dwellings increases at a rate sufficient to keep up with demand for genuinely affordable homes. Governments should aim for investment consistent with meeting a target of a minimum 10% of all housing being public or community housing by 2036.

Conclusion

The worsening crisis in rental housing demands immediate attention, and comprehensive reform across our rental housing systems. We hope the process of developing a clear framework and plan for national reform to our renting laws is one that is consultative, and delivers meaningful outcomes for renting households.

Governments must consult with advocates with direct experience and knowledge of tenancy law, along with other key stakeholders as they develop a national plan. Most importantly they must take this opportunity to hear directly from renters in the community. Renters have direct experience and important expertise about what is going wrong with the system, and must play a key role to help shape the solutions we so urgently need.

Signed by

National Association of Renters' Organisation

Circle Green Community Legal
Darwin Community Legal Service
Tenants' Queensland
Tenants' Union of NSW
Tenants' Union of Tasmania
Tenants' Victoria

The Shelter Network

ACT Shelter
National Shelter
NT Shelter
Queensland Shelter
Shelter NSW
Shelter SA
Shelter Tasmania
Shelter WA

Councils of Social Service

ACT Council of Social Service
Australian Council of Social Services
Northern Territory Council of Social Service
NSW Council of Social Services
Queensland Council of Social Services
Tasmanian Council of Social Service
Victorian Council of Social Service
Western Australia Council of Social Services

Amelie Housing

Anglicare Australia
Anglicare WA
Arc Justice (Victoria)
Asthma Australia
Australian Lawyers for Human Rights
Better Renting
Brotherhood of St. Laurence
Canberra Community Law
Central Coast Tenants' Advice and Advocacy Service (NSW)
Central Tablelands and Blue Mountains Community Legal Centre (NSW)
Colony 47 (Tasmania)
Community Housing Central Australia
Community Housing Industry Australia
Community Housing Limited
Community Legal Centres Australia
Community Legal Centres Qld (CLCQ)
Consumer Policy Research Centre
Council of Single Mothers and their Children
Council on the Ageing ACT
Domestic Violence NSW
Enhance Care Inc (Queensland)
Everybody's Home

Federation of Community Legal Centres Victoria

Financial Counsellors' Association of Western Australia
Foundation for Young Australians
Gold Coast Youth Service (Queensland)
Hobart Women's Shelter
Housing for the Aged Action Group
Hervey Bay Neighbourhood Centre
Hobart City Mission (Tasmania)
Housing Matters Action Group (NSW)
Hunter Tenants' Advice Service (NSW)
Illawarra Legal Centre (NSW)
Ipswich Regional Advocacy Services Inc (Queensland)
Justice Connect
Kimberley Community Legal Services
Marrickville Legal Centre (NSW)
Mid Coast Tenants' Advice Service (NSW)
Mission Australia
National Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander Housing Association
New England and Western Tenants Advice and Advocacy Service (NSW)
Peninsula Community Legal Centre (Victoria)
Public Interest Advocacy Centre
Queensland Alliance for Mental Health
Queensland Youth Housing Coalition
Redfern Legal Centre
Rights & Inclusion Australia
The Salvation Army Australia Territory
Shelter Housing Action Cairns (Queensland)
Southern Youth and Family Services
St Vincent de Paul Australia
Sweltering Cities
Sydney Alliance (NSW)
Think Forward
Tasmanian University Student Association
UMSU Legal Service (Victoria)
Unions Tasmania
Uniting Communities
Victorian Aboriginal Legal Service
Victorian Public Tenants' Association
Western Sydney Community Forum (NSW)
WEstjustice
Women's Legal Service NSW

- 1 Choice, National Shelter, NATO (2018) [Disrupted](#).
- 2 For example see Foodbank Australia (2023) [Submission in response to the Senate Select Committee on Cost of Living Inquiry](#).