



Uniting Vic.Tas Position Paper

Housing and homelessness in Tasmania.

August 2018

Uniting

Uniting's position:

Uniting believes that affordable, safe and secure housing is an essential human right.

Secure and affordable housing fundamentally underpins people's capacity to live dignified and healthy lives with access opportunities and an ability to contribute to their communities.

Homelessness in Tasmania

More than 74,000 Tasmanians live below the poverty line, and as housing costs have gone up, it has become harder for low income Tasmanians to find a home they can afford.

As a result homelessness is growing rapidly [8]. In Hobart, homelessness has risen 21% in the past five years [9].

Officially, there are 1,600 people experiencing homelessness [10], however it is likely that the true number is much higher due to the often 'invisible' homeless population, who may not be sleeping rough, but lack safe, secure and ongoing housing [11]. Four in 10 of Tasmania's homeless are under the age of 25, while one in five are over 55.

While nearly 8000 people were assisted with specialist housing services in 2015-16, in 2018 around 25 requests for housing services are being turned away each day – a 5.3% increase on 2017 [8].



7,859

Tasmanians received support from a specialist homelessness service in 2015-16.



The number of people receiving support **increased by about 5%** a year for the past five years [8].

Affordable housing

Housing availability and affordability is a ‘persistent and growing problem’ [1] facing Tasmania, requiring innovative policy solutions to address immediate, urgent need, as well as investment reflective of the projected increase in housing needs.

Of particular concern for Uniting’s consumers and communities is the constricting rental market. The number of advertised rental properties has decreased 49% over five years, resulting in rapidly inflating rent prices [2]. An estimated 1200 dwellings are believed to have been removed from the rental market by short-stay accommodation websites such as AirBnB [1].

Hobart is now the second least affordable city to rent in Australia, following Sydney [1].

In the past year, median rent costs have risen between 5-8% [1, 3] across Tasmania, outstripping wage growth. Minimum wage rose by just 2.4% [1], while the indexed value of unemployment payments has gone backwards continually since 1996 [4].

Research conducted by Anglicare Tasmania’s Social Action and Research Centre in April 2017 showed that for people on income support, only 6% of advertised rental properties (including

rooms in shared housing) were within reach without experiencing rental stress, and only 2% were suitable for single parent families [2, 5].

This has resulted in many people residing in unsuitable or unsafe housing and increasing numbers of people accessing homelessness services [1]. Shelter Tasmania has stated that housing stress is also increasingly ‘rising up the income ladder’, affecting working households [5]. For people earning minimum wage, only 26% of homes advertised were affordable without causing housing stress [2].

There is also a serious shortage of social housing available. Demand has increased by 36% in the past three years. “Priority” applicants (those who are homeless, have health conditions or whose safety is at risk) can expect to wait nearly a year to be allocated to a home, while “general” applicants may wait more than two years [1].

This is also having an impact on prisoners who are eligible for parole but are unable to leave prison because they do not have secure housing [6]. A Uniting staff member in Tasmania noted that people leaving prison who have attempted to address their problematic behaviours do not want to end up homeless or without secure housing, as they recognise that the risk of recidivism or relapse will be greater [7].

The lack of affordable housing is also creating bottlenecks in emergency and supported housing, as there is not enough affordable or social housing for people to move on to [1].



Between 2015 and 2017, Uniting has had **an 83% increase in people accessing our emergency services** five or more times in a year, indicating that crisis is becoming the new norm for an increasing number of Tasmanians [14].



Uniting supports the reintroduction of the **Reintegrating Ex-Offenders Program**. This program has been shown to reduce homelessness in people when they are released from jail, and the likelihood of recidivism.

¹ Rental stress is defined as spending more than 30% of one’s income on housing [2].

Policy recommendations.

Federal Government

1. The federal government must commit to adequately funding the National Housing and Homelessness Strategy.
2. Taxation policy that benefits property investors at the expense of renters and first homebuyers must be reviewed urgently.
3. Reinstatement of the National Rental Affordability Scheme or a similar program to address the shortage of affordable rental housing.

Tasmanian Government

1. Tenancy laws must be amended to adjust the balance of power between renters and owners, increasing security of tenure and preventing 'rental bidding' on properties.
2. Develop a plan to deliver 3,000 new social housing properties over the next 10 years.
3. Replace stamp duty with land taxes.
4. Increase investment in programs that address the causes of homelessness and provide targeted interventions for the less-visible homeless population (those staying with friends/relatives, sleeping in cars etc).
5. Address blockages in releasing Government land for housing development.
6. Mandate that 5% of properties in developments larger than 30 units are designated as social housing.
7. Building new homes takes time: to address the immediate need facing Tasmanians, the government must consider other mechanisms to get people into safe, secure and long-term housing. Some options include:
 - Introducing a vacant property and foreign investment taxes
 - Managing the impact of online short-stay platforms (such as AirBnB) on the availability of long-term rental housing
 - Require new developments to include a proportion of affordable rentals
 - Reducing the time it takes for tenants to have their bonds returned from the Rental Deposit Authority
 - Broaden the eligibility for access to Streets Ahead and HomeShare programs.

Learn more
vt.uniting.org

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About Uniting

For over 100 years we've delivered community services across Victoria and Tasmania.

We build capacity and confidence in children, young people and families, people with disability, older people and people newly arrived in Australia. We work with people at risk of or experiencing financial crisis, homelessness, mental illness and problems with alcohol and other drugs by empowering them with the support they need to succeed.

As an organisation, we celebrate our diversity and welcome all people regardless of ethnicity, faith, age, disability, culture, language, gender identity or sexual orientation. We acknowledge Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders as Australia's First Peoples and as the traditional owners and custodians of the land on which we work. We welcome lesbian, gay, trans, gender diverse and intersex (LGBTIQ) people at our services. We pledge to provide inclusive and non-discriminatory services.

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