

Senate Standing Committee on Economics

Via email: economics.sen@aph.gov.au

12/08/2024

Dear Senate Economics Legislation Committee,

Re: Submission to the Inquiry into the National Housing and Homelessness Plan Bill 2024 (No 2.)

Jesuit Social Services welcomes the opportunity to comment on the National Housing and Homelessness Plan Bill 2024 (No. 2) (the Bill).

Jesuit Social Services is a social change organisation. We have been working for 47 years delivering support services and advocating for improved policies, legislation and resources to achieve a just society where all people can thrive. We work with some of the most marginalised individuals and communities across Victoria, New South Wales and the Northern Territory.

Jesuit Social Services works alongside people with multiple and complex needs, and people on very low incomes and income support payments. We offer a range of housing and homelessness programs for people who are at risk of homelessness and experience a range of co-occurring issues including mental ill-health, substance misuse, involvement with the justice system and experiences of trauma, including family violence. The participants we work with are often homeless, at risk of homelessness or are living in unsafe and insecure housing environments. These are the people experiencing some of the greatest difficulties obtaining access to safe, secure and affordable housing.

Our housing and homelessness-related programs include:

- [Perry House](#): specialist forensic disability accommodation program providing 24-hour support and residential living skills for young people with a cognitive impairment who are involved with the criminal justice system or are at risk of homelessness.
- [Dillon House](#): 24-hour supported accommodation for young people involved with the justice system who are at risk of homelessness.
- [Next Steps](#): intensive early intervention assertive outreach support for young people at risk of homelessness after involvement with the justice system.
- [ReConnect](#): transitional assistance for men and gender diverse people exiting prison.
- [Link Youth Justice Housing Program](#): head lease housing model providing intensive after hours support for young people who are involved with the justice system who are at risk of homelessness.
- [Maribyrnong Community Residential Facility](#): temporary accommodation and wraparound support for men leaving prison who would otherwise face homelessness.

Jesuit Social Services supports the introduction of the Bill, and recommends that the Federal Government pass it. We strongly affirm the Federal Government's commitment to developing a 10-

year National Housing and Homelessness Plan and we believe that the Bill's proposed approach of mandating the Plan through legislation will make this commitment more enduring. We support the Bill's intent of establishing a human-rights based approach to housing including the introduction of governance and accountability mechanisms, as the Plan must ensure effective housing policy beyond electoral cycles.

Our submission to this Inquiry follows our 2023 submission supporting the development of a [National Housing and Homelessness Plan](#) (the Plan). This submission called for the Plan to be supported by ambitious, evidence-based targets, adequate funding and plans for implementation in order to bring about the significant changes needed to reform Australia's housing system and end homelessness. Our submission recommended growing public and community housing stock; further investment in programs offering tenancy support and wraparound support services for people with complex needs; and the introduction of minimum rental standards.¹ Our submission to the Plan also discussed housing as a human right, to highlight the need for immediate and sustained action on housing and homelessness in Australia.

We also highlighted the human right to adequate housing in our [Submission to the Inquiry into Australia's Human Rights Framework](#), which argued that a Human Rights Act in Australia would need to protect economic, social and cultural rights including the right to secure housing.²

Housing as a human right

Access to secure, long-term housing is an essential foundation for physical and mental wellbeing and personal agency. Without access to appropriate housing, people are unable to engage with other aspects of their life such as health, education and employment.³ Despite this, gaining access to housing is becoming increasingly difficult in Australia, and for some, impossible.⁴

Housing is also a human right.⁵ The Federal Government ratified the 1966 International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights in 1980. Under this, governments must recognise the right of everyone to adequate housing and must ensure appropriate action is taken to realise this right.⁶

Despite this commitment, Australia does not have a federal housing act or strategy which formally enshrines the right to adequate housing or establishes an appropriate monitoring framework for housing policy.⁷ Nor does Australia have a national human rights act or charter. Additionally, while

¹ Jesuit Social Services (2023). Submission to the National Housing and Homelessness Plan. [Weblink](#).

² Jesuit Social Services (2023). Submission to the Inquiry into Australia's Human Rights Framework. [Weblink](#).

³ Infrastructure Australia (2019). An assessment of Australia's Future Infrastructure Needs: The Australian Infrastructure Audit 2019. [Weblink](#).

⁴ Anglicare Australia (2024). 2024: Rental Affordability Snapshot. [Weblink](#); Australian Housing and Urban Research Institute (AHURI) (2024). More 'rich' are renting, while low income renters face greater stress. [Weblink](#).

⁵ Office of the High Commissioner, United Nations (1966). *International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights* (Article 11). [Weblink](#).

⁶ Australian Housing and Urban Research Institute (AHURI) (2024). What does 'Housing as a human right' mean in Australia? [Weblink](#).

⁷ Australian Housing and Urban Research Institute (AHURI) (2024). What does 'Housing as a human right' mean in Australia? [Weblink](#).

Victoria, Queensland and the ACT now all have human rights charters, none of them specifically protect the right to adequate housing.⁸

Therefore, we support the Bill's aim of facilitating a human rights-based approach to housing in the Plan. Aligning Australia's housing policy with its international human rights obligations will add an important layer of accountability, and the Bill presents a valuable opportunity to facilitate and protect the right to housing.

Housing policy governance and accountability

Australia has not had a long-term national strategy for housing since 1992.⁹ As a result, housing policy in Australia has been fragmented and lacking in governance and strategic vision. This lack of long-term housing policy has been a significant barrier, preventing governments from properly addressing the full scope of Australia's rapidly worsening housing crisis.¹⁰ Therefore we support the Bill's proposed processes to develop, implement and maintain the Plan, as they will result in much needed improvements to the governance and accountability of national housing policy.

In summary, we strongly support the Bill. We look forward to the release of the National Housing and Homelessness Plan and encourage the Federal Government to strengthen the Plan by protecting its longevity under the proposed legislation.

We thank you for the opportunity to respond to the Bill. We welcome further discussion with the Senate Economics Legislation Committee regarding the feedback detailed in this letter.

Yours sincerely,



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⁸Australian Housing and Urban Research Institute (AHURI) (2024). What does 'Housing as a human right' mean in Australia? [Weblink.](#)

⁹ Department of Social Services (2023). The National Housing and Homelessness Plan Issues Paper. [Weblink.](#)

¹⁰ Martin, C., Lawson, J., Milligan, V., Hartley, C., Pawson, H. and Dodson, J. (2023). Towards an Australian Housing and Homelessness Strategy: understanding national approaches in contemporary policy. AHURI Final Report No. 401, Australian Housing and Urban Research Institute Limited, Melbourne. [Weblink.](#)