

# StreetCare

## Support for the Homelessness NSW State Election Platform



Homelessness consumer advisory group StreetCare supports and endorses Homelessness NSW's state election platform. Consultation with StreetCare members has resulted in overwhelming support for the priorities identified.

### 1. Increase in social housing

We endorse the call by Homelessness NSW for an overall increase in the stock of social housing available, through investment in constructing additional social housing dwellings, and requiring affordable housing targets for private developments. While we support the call for an additional 5,000 social housing dwellings per year, we note that this should be seen only as an initial investment in addressing the critical shortage of appropriate housing: the total number of dwellings needs to be doubled in order to address the current levels of housing needs within New South Wales<sup>1</sup>.

StreetCare also emphasizes the need for any future investment in social housing to provide safe, purpose-built facilities which promote wellbeing and community cohesion. Social housing must provide adequate support for individuals so they are able to improve outcomes for themselves and their communities.

When I first became homeless FACS told me that the way the system worked, I could be waiting 20yrs for a place. This meant that I had to find accommodation in the meantime. This pushed me into marginalised accommodation where it was impossible to find and maintain employment so I could improve my situation. I waited 15 years before this lifestyle impacted my health so much that I was classified high needs and housed as a priority.

Dave, StreetCare member

### 2. Need for a whole-of-government response

We recognise the need for greater cooperation and coordination between state government departments of justice, mental health and housing. In our experience, this can result in unfair and arbitrary outcomes for individuals. We endorse Homelessness NSW's call for a whole-of-government response to homelessness and a commitment to ensuring 'no exits' from institutions and/or out of home care into homelessness.

When any Aboriginal person is released from prison, they need to be given the opportunity to return to country straight away. That is where they'll be able to heal, in the company of their elders. Giving them a few nights' accommodation in a local motel is no good to them. The government removed them from country, so they have a responsibility to enable them to return.

Carol, StreetCare member and proud Kamiliroi woman

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<sup>1</sup>Australian Housing and Urban Research Institute (2018) "Social Housing as infrastructure: an investment pathway", Melbourne: Australian Housing and Urban Research Institute Limited.

Recognising the increased vulnerability to homelessness of young people, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, people with disability and those who have experienced family and domestic violence is vitally important. At the same time, it is essential that resources allocated to these high-needs groups does not have the effect of leaving behind those who may not “fit” into such categories, resulting in them being excluded from housing, despite their immediate need.

StreetCare member Maddy encountered several barriers to securing safe, appropriate and affordable housing, the result of restrictive-eligibility initiatives prioritising “high needs” applicants.

I have had a history of domestic violence; that’s the reason I left my last private rental property in 2015. However, because the AVO put in place was only for the following year, I am no longer entitled to the rental subsidy provided by FACS to help domestic violence survivors rebuild their lives. There was another initiative recently, giving individuals with medium to high needs housing, with a requirement of engaging with support services for 6-18 months. When I enquired with someone from the support agency who I knew professionally from my time on StreetCare about the program, she directly told me that I wouldn’t be suitable, as applicants had to be “high needs”.

I may not be “high-needs”, but I do need a house.

Maddy, StreetCare Member

### **3. Services for regional and rural areas**

We strongly agree that reform is desperately needed to the specialist homelessness services system ensure availability of adequate services for regional and rural areas which have are still dealing with the changes made by the ‘Going Home, Staying Home’ reforms. StreetCare members Dave and Martin have both experienced the consequences of the lack of available services in rural and remote areas first hand.

Where I live in the Shoalhaven area, the Going Home Staying Home reforms have had devastating consequences. There is a significant population of entrenched rough sleepers in the area, and absolutely no front-line services. When they cut services down here, all they look at are the operation costs. They don’t consider the social costs of closing services for the communities they serve.

Dave, StreetCare member

When I lived in Bourke, the nearest service was over four hours’ drive away.

Martin, StreetCare member

### **4. The need for consumer participation**

The Public Interest Advocacy Centre and StreetCare have long promoted a human rights approach to housing and homelessness. This involves placing consumers at the centre of service delivery and actively supporting consumers to participate in finding solutions to homelessness. We strive to dismantle both individual and systemic barriers to safe and affordable housing.

Some of the most significant challenges we face include the lack of available social housing dwellings in the face of exponentially growing demand, the lack of cross-department and cross-level government cooperation, and the under-resourcing of specialist homelessness services. The election platform that Homelessness NSW have designed begins to address these issues. Its adoption by any future government would constitute an important step forward.

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