

Social and Affordable Housing Unit
Treasury
Email: housing@treasury.gov.au

Submission on proposed amendments to the Housing Australia Investment Mandate Direction 2018

September 6, 2024

Dear Committee Secretary,

Thank you for the opportunity to make a submission on proposed amendments to the Housing Australia Investment Mandate Direction on behalf of Habitat for Humanity Australia.

Habitat for Humanity Australia (**Habitat**) is an affiliate of Habitat for Humanity International, an acclaimed global development organisation that partners with a full range of stakeholders in more than 70 countries. Habitat's vision is of a world where everyone has a decent place to live. We work toward our vision by building strength, stability and self-reliance in partnership with people and families in need of a decent and affordable home. We work with local communities, governments, peer organizations, and the private sector to remove the systemic barriers preventing low-income and historically underserved families from accessing adequate, affordable shelter.

In Australia, Habitat for Humanity Australia is a registered Tier 3 Community Housing Provider that works to support the delivery of impactful housing solutions focused on increasing access to decent, secure and affordable housing for the most vulnerable, including women and children escaping domestic violence.

Habitat welcomes National Housing Infrastructure Facility (**NHIF**)'s announcement of the \$1b increase to support crisis and transitional accommodation for women and children experiencing domestic violence and for youth experiencing homelessness.

Our Recent Experience

Supported by the Department of Social Services as part of the Safe Places Emergency Accommodation program, in 2024 Habitat completed construction of a new Family and Domestic Violence Refuge, Wirrawee Gunya Dharruk, in Western Sydney. Operated by our partner DV West, the 9 bedroom, 4 unit refuge will provide a safe, secure, comfortable, temporary home for up to 80 Aboriginal women and children each year. Residents will be provided with essential services and guided through every step of the transition to their own safe place to live. Other outreach DV support services will be available from the Refuge to the

wider indigenous community in Dharruk, reaching hundreds more women and their children every year.

Response to Consultation Questions

1. What are the merits of targeting additional funding towards crisis and transitional accommodation as part of the broader mix of acute and social housing?

The targeted mix is welcomed as existing social and affordable should models do not meet the specific needs of these cohorts.

- Young people have the highest rate of homelessness in Australia. With current cost of living pressures, lower wage-earning capacity and rate of youth allowance payments, affordable housing is inaccessible to them. Out of home care participants are forced out once they hit 18 years and are very vulnerable.
- Similarly, women escaping violence often struggle to afford alternative housing options as they balance childcare and other responsibilities. DFV is a leading cause of homelessness for women and children, with the proportion of Specialist Homelessness Services (SHS) clients experiencing DFV growing from 32 per cent in 2012-13 to 38 per cent in 2022-23. In 2022-23 SHS agencies assisted around 104,000 clients (of any age) who experienced family and domestic violence, equating to 38% of all SHS clients.

Targeted funding will avail opportunities for these cohorts to successfully transition to mainstream housing.

2. Are the definitions for crisis and transitional accommodation in the draft Investment Mandate amendments appropriate, and separately, are the definitions of the cohorts of women and children, and youth appropriate?

In reviewing documents supplied by the Department, it appears that the use of transitional housing is inconsistent with the sector's shared understanding of transitional housing being medium term and/or for a usual period of 12-18 months. This understanding is reflected in the definition of medium term housing found in the NSW Homelessness Strategy 2018-2023 (noting the new strategy is underdevelopment) and again in the NSW Government's specialist homelessness service program specifications.

Cohort definitions are appropriate, however as the needs of women and children and experiencing domestic violence, and youth are distinct. It is important that these cohorts do not become conflated in funding opportunities. Funding opportunities and responses should also consider the intersectionality of other priority and high need cohorts including ATSI women and women living with disability.



We build **strength, stability, and self-reliance** *through shelter.*

The needs of children and young people under 16 years of age, should also be considered – as these groups are experiencing increasing rates of homelessness – often as a result of family and domestic violence.

These factors require a diversity of responses to accommodate the needs of individuals and family units. For example, the Core and Cluster model (supported by the NSW Department of Communities and Justice) enables families to stay together in a self-contained residential unit with access to support services. This supports recovery of families from trauma and creates stability which can better support transition to longer term housing options.

Habitat for Humanity Australia looks forward to participating in further consultations and funding rounds to ensure suitable delivery of housing

Yours sincerely,

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Habitat for Humanity Australia

