



SUBMISSION:

**A HOUSING STRATEGY
FOR NSW
Discussion Paper**



The Committee for the Hunter (the Committee) welcomes the NSW Government's Discussion Paper: *A Housing Strategy for NSW* and the opportunity to provide input.

Good housing policy is good economic policy. The right housing in the right place at the right time is critical to attracting, retaining and supporting a skilled workforce. Issues of housing affordability will continue to impede NSW's economic competitiveness without intervention. Residential development is a significant source of economic activity.

Secure, quality, affordable and accessible housing is also critical in supporting the most vulnerable in our community to access opportunity.

The Australian Council of Social Service has estimated that there is a national shortage of more than 400,000 homes that are affordable for people who are homeless or living on the lowest incomes. A snapshot of the Hunter region shows that just 5.5 per cent of all rental properties advertised across the Newcastle/Lake Macquarie, Hunter, Central Coast and Mid Coast regions were affordable for households on income support.

This submission brings together, for the first time, Hunter region representatives from the community sector, developers, the construction sector and community housing providers to be part of the solution to this growing challenge for the state and our own region.

That is why it's encouraging to see Government's focus on a 'housing first' approach, which recognises that access to safe and affordable housing is a social and economic enabler for all members of the community regardless of life stage or where they may sit on the housing continuum.

A 'one size fits all' approach will not take into account that housing issues and needs differ across geography and population groups

The factors that influence housing in regional areas are different to those affecting the Greater Sydney Metropolitan area. These include lower densities of residential housing, distance and accessibility of housing to jobs, services and education. Regional areas like the Hunter also have higher proportions of vulnerable communities experiencing financial and housing stress than our metropolitan neighbour.

The Committee for the Hunter advocates for a place-based focus for housing policy, which takes into account the unique housing dynamics of regional communities and provides a framework for targeted support.

The Discussion Paper acknowledges that housing issues and needs are different across population groups. These include young people and students, older people and people living with a disability. The Committee supports alternative housing models that address the distinct needs of these vulnerable population groups and integrate services, care and accommodation.

Achieving the Intended Outcomes outlined in the Discussion Paper requires an integrated and coordinated approach

The Discussion Paper documents the diverse range of factors influencing housing in NSW. These are not just the domain of the NSW Minister for Housing. Issues cross policy portfolios, levels of government and sectors.

Coordination within and across governments and delivery partners is essential to success.

The Committee would welcome more detail on how land-use planning, transport, infrastructure and service provision across NSW Government portfolios will be coordinated in order to achieve better housing outcomes.

We acknowledge the leadership of the NSW Government through the development of a new Housing Strategy. In particular, the Committee supports recognition of the strong role of government-owned land in delivering housing outcomes highlighted in the paper.

Priorities and actions emerging in the final Strategy should not just be confined to those within the NSW Government's jurisdiction. This is an opportunity to assert the needs of the communities of NSW and to develop a framework for collective action that sets out the roles and responsibilities of other levels of government, the private and community sectors.

Innovative public and private partnerships

The Committee for the Hunter welcomes the Government's emphasis on the importance of innovative partnerships to deliver comprehensive and long-term solutions to housing.

The Committee provides an important platform for businesses, industry, the community sector, our health and education institutions and governments to apply our collective expertise and resources to solve local problems. Our focus is on issues that impact the Hunter region as a whole, that cross levels of government, their portfolios and sectors.

Our members have individually advocated and engaged with governments on innovative models for housing delivery and management. These include: the Urban Development Institute of Australia on 'Build to Rent'; Compass Housing on community housing provider models and financing options; and the Samaritans on integrating social service delivery with accommodation. These technical options are the subject of separate submissions to this consultation process that we encourage you to consider.

COVID-19 economic stimulus and recovery

COVID-19 has exacerbated housing issues as more people and households experience financial and housing stress – including those who have unexpectedly found themselves at risk of losing income and accommodation. This makes the case for action even more urgent.

According to recent data from the Housing Industry Association, half a million jobs in residential construction are at risk across Australia over the next year as a result of COVID-19 impacts. This includes at least 160,000 jobs in NSW.

In the Hunter, the construction sector employs over 26,000 people (almost 10 per cent of the workforce) and generates economic output of \$13 billion.

COVID-19 recovery policies and investments that increase and improve the stock of social and affordable housing can help to stimulate the construction sector and local economy while providing homes for people most in need.

The NSW Government has willing partners in the Hunter to address complex housing challenges

The region was a test site for the National Disability Insurance Scheme, informing the national roll-out. The Hunter offers a representative sample of populations, geography and scale to support the design and testing of new approaches to housing, which cross disciplines, sectors and levels of government.

The Hunter would welcome the opportunity to work with the Government to treat the Hunter region as a 'sandpit' for innovative solutions with potential to be scaled across NSW. The Committee extended this invitation to the NSW and Federal Treasurers and Housing Ministers in May 2020.

Targets and measuring success

The final policy would benefit from a clear articulation of priorities and goals for housing in NSW against each theme. This will provide clarity and direction for the Government's delivery partners, help target specific initiatives and allow progress to be measured.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide feedback on the *Discussion Paper: A Housing Strategy for NSW*.

Should you require further information please contact Alice Thompson, CEO Committee for Hunter, by email: contact@alicethompson.com.au or by phone: 0490 688 125.

The Committee for the Hunter is an independent and inclusive champion for the people of the Hunter and their enterprises, providing advocacy and thought leadership to build a sustainable and prosperous future for the region.

For further information about the Committee please visit www.hunter.org.au

