



ACT Affordable Housing Action Plan PHASE II

STRATEGIC SUMMARY

**Homelessness and affordable accommodation options
for older Canberrans
August 2009**

Foreword by the Chief Minister

All Canberrans have a right to safe, secure and affordable housing.

Housing affordability is a priority for this Government. Since the release of the Affordable Housing Action Plan in April 2007, the Government has successfully worked together with the community and industry to deliver all 62 initiatives.

In the past two years, we have seen record releases of residential land, 15 per cent of all new developments are now also required to deliver house and land packages for \$300,000 or less. Stamp duty concessions for first home buyers have been increased, community housing has been boosted with an equity injection of \$40 million and a \$50 million loan facility, and new efficiencies have been achieved in public housing.

The Government is now building on these achievements with initiatives to meet the housing needs of older Canberrans and the homeless.

While much work has been done in recent years to increase the supply of accommodation choices for older Canberrans, not everyone can afford these options. Meanwhile, an ageing community means that the demand for affordable housing appropriate to the needs of older people will only continue to grow. It is for these reasons that I asked the reconvened Steering Group to focus on the issues affecting housing choices for older Canberrans and to recommend new ways to increase the supply and diversity of affordable housing for this important group.



I also asked the Steering Group to focus on the issue of homelessness in the ACT. While the Government has implemented a successful homelessness strategy, and continues to make addressing homelessness a priority, there still exists a problem with homelessness in the ACT, albeit at a lower rate than the rest of the nation.

The Steering Group, assisted by Advisory Groups made up of key community and industry representatives, has made 21 innovative recommendations regarding these issues, focussing not only on addressing immediate issues, but also looking ahead to provide affordable housing and tenancy options into the future.

The ACT Government looks forward to working with the Australian Government, industry and the community to implement the strategies outlined in this document.

I commend to you the next phase of the ACT Affordable Housing Action Plan.

Jon Stanhope MLA
ACT Chief Minister

Addressing Homelessness in the ACT

Despite considerable efforts by Government, homelessness is a persistent problem, affecting more than 1,300 Canberrans. It can result from a variety of factors, including mental health issues, drug and alcohol dependency, domestic violence, a lack of employment or training opportunities, and a shortage of stable, affordable accommodation.

There needs to be a focus on breaking the cycle of homelessness and assisting people to maintain tenancies. Addressing homelessness not only requires the provision of housing, but involves engaging with the homeless, encouraging them into stable tenancies, and providing appropriate, responsive and timely services to prevent the reoccurrence of homelessness.

The strategy in this document builds on the work of the previous ACT homelessness strategy and addresses the needs of homeless people through the provision of outreach services and assistance for 'at risk' groups. The recommendations include specific interventions and tailored solutions to target identified groups including rough sleepers, people with mental illness, indigenous people, the elderly, families escaping domestic violence, unemployed youth, and people exiting custodial institutions.

Active outreach to engage the chronically homeless and a new centralised intake system

For those people who are chronically homeless and living on the street, the ACT Government will initiate an active outreach, Street to Home program, to help people to engage with mainstream services, and to move off the street into more appropriate accommodation.

A centralised intake system will also be established to make it easier for people to access homelessness services. The new system will include a common waiting list for public and community housing, and will co-locate Housing ACT's Gateway Services and crisis accommodation advice service.

Recommendation 1:

Provide active outreach to engage chronically homeless people and rough sleepers who do not utilise mainstream services through the implementation of a "Street to Home" program, and a "who's new on the streets" committee.

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Recommendation 2:

Facilitate easy access to homelessness services through centralised intake, a common waiting list for public and community housing, and collocating Housing ACT's Gateway Services and crisis accommodation advice service.

Coordination of mental health and housing services to assist people to maintain tenancies

The strategy includes a strong focus on providing appropriate health services, in particular mental health, and drug and alcohol services, as well as building an ongoing relationship with the client, and assisting them with housing support through the Housing Accommodation and Support Initiative (HASI). HASI will provide accommodation support and rehabilitation, clinical care, and long-term secure and affordable housing for people with mental illness.

Recommendation 3:

Develop options to implement a program to increase tenancy and clinical support for tenants with a mental illness similar to the Housing Accommodation and Support Initiative (HASI) in NSW.

Linking housing with employment and training opportunities to assist younger homeless people to maintain stable tenancies

A Foyer housing model will be introduced to provide housing for people aged 16 to 25. The housing model will deliver assistance to youth at risk of homelessness, supporting them with employment and training goals, and providing guidance to assist them to live independently.

Recommendation 4:

Introduce a youth Foyer model in the Territory linking youth housing with opportunities for employment and training for people aged 16 to 25.

Support for victims of domestic violence to remain housed

A scheme will be developed to allow victims of domestic violence to stay in the family home, while the perpetrator will be removed from the tenancy to limit displacement of victims of violence. It is recommended that appropriate accommodation options and a support program also be developed to provide perpetrators with access to housing and rehabilitation options.

Recommendation 5:

Investigate residential tenancy options to support victims of domestic violence to remain housed through a partnership between Housing ACT, the Domestic Violence Crisis Service and appropriate legal services

Public housing that is flexible to the changing needs of tenants and families

To limit housing stress for tenant families caused by overcrowding, the public housing capital works program will include a focus on modifications and alterations to help family groups stay together and support each other.

Recommendation 6:

Focus the program of capital upgrades to social housing dwellings through inclusion of accessibility modifications, extensions, and temporary structures where appropriate and permitted under planning laws, to address changing family composition and overcrowding thus allowing tenants to remain housed in place.

Improve accommodation options for the elderly homeless

Accommodation services will be developed for the elderly homeless and for older people at risk of homelessness, providing housing and care including low and high care facilities, and independent living units. A model similar to the successful Wintringham program in Melbourne will be considered to assist this often “forgotten” group of elderly homeless.

Recommendation 7:

Introduce support and accommodation services for the elderly or frail homeless or older people at risk of homelessness (including the Wintringham model) through provision of an appropriate site for development.

Provide housing and support at critical points of need

Stable accommodation options will be developed, together with expanded transitional housing programs to provide support for people exiting institutions, and emergency and crisis accommodation.

Recommendation 8:

Provide stable long term housing with transitional support for people exiting the Alexander MacConochie Centre, and other institutional or care settings.

Recommendation 9:

Build on the stairwell model of accommodation and support used as part of Housing ACT's Transitional Housing Program to provide transitional housing for people requiring short term assistance.

A whole of government framework

A whole of government, whole of sector approach is needed to ensure an effective response to primary homelessness in the ACT. Such a response will assist in the coordination of existing services, and in sharing knowledge to facilitate effective outcomes.

Recommendation 10:

ACT Government housing and human service agencies to develop and sign protocols similar to the NSW Housing and Human Services Accord to ensure that responsibility for homelessness and housing is effectively shared and managed on a whole of government basis.

Affordable housing options for older Canberrans

There is currently a shortage in affordable housing options for older people in Canberra, and an ageing population means that demand for this housing will increase significantly over the next 20 years. It is generally accepted that housing stress for older people is most often caused by accommodation that is inappropriate for their changing needs. Addressing the demand for affordable housing for older Canberrans will require increasing the supply and diversity of appropriate accommodation, while also taking into account the need for care and support, and for continued independence of residents.

The strategy for affordable housing for older Canberrans seeks to assist older Canberrans across tenures and income groups. It will assist lower income groups, including older renters, by building on the work of Housing ACT and community housing providers in responding to demand for affordable housing. For middle income earners, the strategy aims to increase the supply of retirement village or cluster housing options, including affordable independent living units.

The strategy also recognises the desirability of 'ageing in place', and recommends measures to ensure the supply across Canberra of housing that includes flexible design features to meet the changing needs of an ageing occupant. Complementing this, the strategy supports the establishment of a community based support network for the provision of care and services

More appropriate public and community housing

The number of public and community housing properties appropriate to the needs of ageing tenants will be increased to assist public housing tenants and low income renters who cannot afford entry to the private rental market and have changing support requirements.

Recommendation 11:

Expand the program for redevelopment of Housing ACT properties to provide more appropriate housing for older tenants, and explore partnership opportunities between Housing ACT and community care providers for the flexible provision of care to tenants.

Recommendation 12:

Engage with CHC Affordable Housing, and other community housing providers to develop a strategy for their contribution to the provision of affordable housing for older Canberrans.

Remove barriers to market response to demand for affordable housing for older Canberrans

Investment from a range of providers in the housing and aged care sector will be crucial in increasing the amount of affordable housing stock for older people in Canberra. Government will work to remove barriers to a more flexible market response to the demand for affordable aged accommodation to assist middle income older Canberrans, including renters.

Recommendation 13:

Mainstream provision of affordable aged accommodation villages through pilot schemes and land releases that better enable private investment.

Increase diversity of housing types

Greater diversity and choice of housing options for older people in existing suburbs and greenfields developments, including granny flats, pre-fabricated small housing, and dual occupancies will be explored to facilitate a viable affordable alternative to independent living units in retirement complexes. A review of the current planning requirements and consultation with industry will be conducted to determine any barriers that may impede this type of development.

Recommendation 14:

Encourage and enable the affordable provision of granny flats, demountables / prefabricated dwellings and extensions, and for dual occupancies, in existing and new suburbs.

Recommendation 15:

Support the development of an exhibition home in the University of Canberra Innovation Centre to test the use of pre-fabricated dwellings in the provision of affordable accommodation for older people, by seeking expressions of interest from the market.

Mainstream universal design to help ‘ageing in place’

Universal design will be mainstreamed to increase the stock of housing, both new and existing, that is flexible and responsive to the changing needs of occupants as they age.

Recommendation 16:

Work with industry to develop Universal Design Guidelines for the Territory.

Recommendation 17:

Introduce a requirement that by the end of 2010, 20 per cent of all new detached housing comply with the universal design guidelines, with a target of 50 per cent by 2015, and 100 per cent by the end of 2020.

Recommendation 18:

Develop a checklist for voluntary disclosure of universal design and sustainability features on sale or rent of properties.

Promote home modification

The falls prevention program will be extended to encourage people to assess their home and prepare for ageing. Such a program will be targeted not only to the over 70's demographic, but also to the baby boomer generation, to encourage modifications to dwellings to limit the potential for falls in the future.

Recommendation 19:

Expand promotion of the falls prevention program and investigate options for a program that encourages appropriate home modifications (eg. rebates for home modification for eligible home owners, such as those eligible for a Seniors Card).

Create community links to support older Canberrans living independently

A Community Access Network will be established to provide a range of services to its members – older people living independently in the community – to enable them to age in place while maintaining important social links. Services may include transportation services, health and wellness programs, handyman and cleaning services, meals on wheels, pet sitting, and computer support, as well as short and long term assisted living services.

Recommendation 20:

Engage with the not-for-profit sector and service providers on the scope for a Community Access Network pilot project.

Increase supply of affordable options for ageing in place

The diversity of affordable housing options for ageing in place that provide a range of universally designed dwelling types to cater for occupants in a variety of social and income situations will be increased by encouraging an 'Apartments for Life' model development. Such a development would include a blend of housing arrangements, catering for people requiring low rent social housing, through to renting or buying apartments at market prices.

Recommendation 21:

Seek private investment, including not-for-profit providers, for older persons' accommodation development, combining universal design and external services to facilitate ageing in place (such as the 'Apartments for Life' model). Subject to a successful EOI, release a suitable site for such a development.

