

2016-17 Election Priorities – Homelessness and Housing Affordability

The Issue – Housing in Canberra is not affordable for households in the bottom two income quintiles and this is driving financial insecurity and homelessness

The ACT private rental and for purchase markets fail to offer housing that is suitable to the needs of people with disabilities, older people, younger people, and families on low incomes (households with less than \$90k p.a. before tax).

The last census in 2011 reported a 70 per cent rise in homelessness in Canberra.ⁱ 1,785 Canberrans were experiencing homelessness in Canberra on Census night in 2011.ⁱⁱ 26% of people counted as experiencing homelessness in the ACT on Census night 2011 were aged 12 – 24. This means 464* young Canberrans had no place to call home.ⁱⁱⁱ Just under half of the young people counted as experiencing homelessness in the ACT on Census night 2011 were staying in youth homelessness refuges.^{iv} Young people leaving state care are at high risk of experiencing homelessness after leaving/being discharged. The CREATE Foundation found 35% of young people who exited state care experienced homelessness within a year of discharge (across Australia).^v

The Impact

People who are eligible for public housing can wait up to three years for a home.^{vi} The restricted supply of social housing and the relatively high costs in the private rental market lead to high levels of financial stress and household budget compromises^{vii} (e.g. cutting back on food, delaying paying utility bills, not visiting the doctor and/or going without prescribed medicine) without any financial or wealth benefit in the short or long run.

There will always be a need to provide crisis housing services. However, in the ACT these services are being used as a safety net, albeit one that is not able to catch the large number of people whose housing needs are not met in the private or public housing market.

Industries with low wages (community services, retail, hospitality) are unable to attract and retain staff. One example is Tourism which reports ongoing difficulties in this area.^{viii}

People seeking more affordable housing move out to the surrounding regions, increasing pressure on our roads, reducing the viability of public transport systems, increasing non-resident demand in our education/health/community service systems from people not paying fees, charges or taxes in the ACT.^{ix}

THE SOLUTION – Recognise that the government has an essential role to intervene to address housing market gaps for people in the bottom two income quintiles (household income of less than \$90,000 a year before tax).

OUR ASK: Invest in affordable housing as core infrastructure necessary to the social and economic sustainability of our city and ensure services working with people who are homeless have adequate funds to be effective

1. Fund accommodation and support services at an adequate standard and to an adequate level so we can respond promptly and effectively to people who are homeless, or at risk of homelessness, to support recovery from homelessness and prevent recurrence of homelessness.
2. Announce a whole of Government commitment to address homelessness which includes a requirement that all Directorates report on how their policies and funding decisions impact on homelessness as part of their annual reporting requirements; and an agreement to minimum funding requirements for each ACT Directorate with part of the operating budget of each Directorate allocated to improving housing affordability and/or reducing homelessness.
3. Increase supply of accessible, affordable housing to rent and to buy for households in the bottom 40% income quintiles. Measures should include establishing a land release pipeline to improve certainty of supply; targeting demand side housing affordability measures to low and moderate income groups; and including access to affordable rental as well as home ownership in all policy initiatives addressing housing affordability

(Authorised by Susan Helyar)

ⁱ ABS, *Census of Population and Housing: Estimating Homelessness, 2011*, cat no. 2049.0, accessed 1 September 2016, <[http://www.ausstats.abs.gov.au/ausstats/subscriber.nsf/0/EB59F237159F7102CA257AB100170B61/\\$File/20490_2011.pdf](http://www.ausstats.abs.gov.au/ausstats/subscriber.nsf/0/EB59F237159F7102CA257AB100170B61/$File/20490_2011.pdf)>, 2012, p.8.

ⁱⁱ *ibid.*, p.19.

ⁱⁱⁱ *ibid.*, p.16. (*Rounded figure.)

^{iv} *ibid.*, p.25.

^v McDowall JJ, *CREATE Report Card 2009: Transitioning From Care: Tracking Progress*, CREATE Foundation, Sydney, accessed 5 October 2016, <<http://create.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2014/12/05.-CREATE-Report-Card-Transitioning-From-Care-Tracking-Progress-November-2009.pdf>>, 2009, p.57.

^{vi} See the ACT Government public housing wait list for further details: ACT Government, 'Social Housing Waiting List', accessed 1 September 2016, <http://www.communityservices.act.gov.au/hcs/services/social_housing/waiting_lists>, 2016.

^{vii} Housing and Homelessness Policy Consortium, ACT, *Housing and the labour market in the ACT Findings from focus groups with workers in the ACT, January 2015*, Housing and Homelessness Policy Consortium, Canberra ACT, 2016.

^{viii} Deloitte Access Economics, *Australian Tourism Labour Force Report: 2015-2020*, Deloitte Access Economics, accessed 5 October 2016, <https://www.tra.gov.au/documents/Australian_Tourism_Labour_Force_FINAL.PDF>, 2015, p.56.

^{ix} Packham R, 'Where are Canberra's most affordable suburbs?', *The Canberra Times*, accessed 5 October 2016, <<http://www.allhomes.com.au/news/where-are-canberras-most-affordable-suburbs-20160330-gnup5u/>>, 2016.