

It's time to end Queensland's housing crisis

Queensland is in the grip of a housing crisis. There are 50,301 people on Queensland's social housing register,¹ most regional towns and cities have rental vacancy rates below 1 per cent,² and the cost of renting continues to increase significantly across the state.³

QCOSS acknowledges the Queensland Government's *Housing and Homelessness Action Plan 2021-2025*,⁴ the associated *Investment Growth Initiative*⁵ and the planned 6,365 builds to be commenced by 2025, adding to the existing 74,133 social housing dwellings in Queensland.⁶

The 2032 Brisbane Olympic Games is an important milestone in Queensland's future. Strategic, long-term investments into community infrastructure such as social housing will benefit all Queenslanders for generations. In anticipation of this milestone, QCOSS urges the Queensland Government to do all that it can to end the housing crisis.

When stakeholders as diverse as the Property Council, REIQ, Master Builders, LGAQ, QCOSS, QShelter and many frontline services join to call for urgent action, the Queensland Government should respond. A whole of government response is required and the Queensland Housing Summit called by the Premier is welcomed.

The Queensland Housing Summit should include consideration of the following:

1. Develop a plan that's fit for purpose

There are currently 27,437 households on the social housing register. The register has grown by 78 per cent over the past four years.⁷

The Queensland Government plans to commence building 6,365 new dwellings by 2025.⁸

The Auditor General's recent report demonstrated that the Department of Communities, Housing and the Digital Economy has not forecast how the register will grow in coming years.

Clearly, the rate of commencements bears no relationship to current or future need.

QCOSS members are working with Queenslanders across the state living in tents, cars and hotel rooms. Many of these families are not eligible for social housing. There is an urgent need for more short-term accommodation and affordable rental properties.

¹ Queensland Government Open Data Portal 2021, "Social Housing Register at 30 June 2021". <https://www.data.qld.gov.au/dataset/social-housing-register>.

² Real Estate Institute of Queensland, REIQ's Residential Vacancy Report for the June Quarter 2022, www.reiq.com/articles/queensland-rental-market-remains-under-squeeze/.

³ Domain, March 2022 Rental Report <https://www.domain.com.au/research/rental-report/march-2022/>.

⁴ Queensland Department of Communities, Housing and Digital Economy. 2021. "Housing and Homelessness Action Plan 2021-2025". <https://www.chde.qld.gov.au/about/strategy/housing/housing-and-homelessness-action-plan-2021-2025>

⁵ Queensland Department of Communities, Housing and Digital Economy. 2021. "Queensland Housing Investment Growth Initiative". <https://www.chde.qld.gov.au/about/strategy/housing/queensland-housing-investment-growth-initiative>.

⁶ Queensland Audit Office, 'Delivering social housing services', 12 July 2022 <https://www.qao.qld.gov.au/sites/default/files/2022-07/Delivering%20social%20housing%20services%20%28Report%201%20%E2%80%932022%E2%80%9323%29.pdf>.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Ibid.

The Queensland Government should develop an ambitious, whole of government plan that has a goal of ensuring every Queenslander has a roof over their head by the Olympics in 2032. This plan should be developed by the Queensland Government in consultation with the private and community sector, including through the Housing Summit.

2. Supply more homes

The supply of housing in Queensland is not adequate for our growing population.⁹

The Queensland Government should explore all options to increase the supply of accessible social and affordable housing including by leveraging funding from the Commonwealth Government and working closely with local councils.

At least 5,000 new social homes must be supplied each year for the next decade. This should be achieved through partnerships between government and the private and community sectors. Government approval processes should be simplified so that projects can get underway quickly and the scale target can be achieved.

The Queensland Government should set clear annual targets for commencements (defined as the commencement of construction, when the first physical building activity has occurred on site) and completions. These targets should be reported against in the annual Service Delivery Statements for the relevant government departments.

Growing supply can be achieved through:

- **Expanding the Housing Investment Fund**

The Housing Investment Fund has potential to deliver more social housing commencements than originally proposed. The Queensland Government could facilitate the commencement of an additional 3,600 social housing dwellings per \$1 billion invested.

The original aims of the fund and its proposed expansion can be supported by introducing inclusionary zoning into Queensland's planning framework and mandating social and affordable housing development in Priority Development Areas.

- **Greater capital investment, including for regional Queensland**

While the Housing Investment Fund's promise of 3,600 social housing dwellings is welcomed, the nature of the funding model means that these dwellings are likely be part of large property developments in places where there are larger populations.

The housing crisis is acute throughout Queensland, including regional Queensland. Critical frontline services in regional and remote Queensland are struggling to employ and retain their workforce because of the lack of affordable rental properties.

Ensuring social and affordable regional housing developments occur in critical areas of need and where future growth is expected should be prioritised at the same time as delivering for densely populated areas.

- **Repurposing, retaining, re-building and re-using**

The Queensland Government should look at all existing government owned buildings and land and explore increasing, expanding and repurposing these assets to increase the supply of housing.

⁹ Queensland's population is growing faster than any other Australian jurisdiction, at 1.4% in the year ending 31 December 2021 according to ABS data.

Public housing and land suitable for residential development should not be sold unless it will be used for private residential development with at least 30 per cent of the resulting dwellings being set aside for social and affordable housing.

- **Regulation of short-term lettings**

Regulation and taxation of properties used for short term lettings (for example “AirBnB”) should be reviewed to scale back the attraction of withdrawing such homes from the mainstream rental market.

- **Housing as critical infrastructure and an Olympics legacy**

The 2032 Olympics is an unprecedented moment for our state to invest in social infrastructure that will be a legacy for all Queenslanders. This should include connecting the goal of providing housing for all Queenslanders to Olympics planning and ensuring that significant portions of the Olympics Villages and Press Villages become social and affordable housing after the games.

3. Services embedded in housing

For many people our members work with, availability and affordability of housing alone will not solve homelessness. People often require improved access to healthcare and cultural and community services to meet their individual needs.

To ensure all Queenslanders have a roof over their head, integrated service delivery and investment in services is required. This includes investment in outreach services and domestic and family violence services.

Ten per cent of new social housing supply should be supportive housing responding to people who require additional support, including women escaping domestic and family violence.

4. Solutions for families, children and youth homelessness

37.1 per cent of the people accessing specialist homelessness services in Queensland in 2020-21 were aged between 0 and 19-years-old. Despite this, the social housing system is primarily designed for adults and not for children and young people who need to develop independent living skills and require longer-term support.

QCROSS proposes allocating a percentage of homes built to specifically address the needs of families, children and young people experiencing homelessness. In addition, financial incentives should be provided by government to ensure that housing young people in community housing does not result in a financial disadvantage for housing providers.

969 children younger than 18 and living alone presented at specialist homelessness services in Queensland last year. Housing solutions should be made available to all these children.

5. Supporting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community housing providers

There are 64 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community housing providers in Queensland.

Queensland Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community housing providers were historically funded by the Commonwealth Government. Since the end of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission (ATSIC) in 2005 and the abolishment of the Commonwealth Government Community Housing and Infrastructure Programme (CHIP) in 2006, Queensland Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community housing providers lost access to Commonwealth Government funding to enable them to deliver much needed housing solutions to their local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities.

Many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community housing providers in Queensland now own houses that are vacant because they cannot afford to repair them. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander

community housing providers in Queensland own and manage approximately 2,000 dwellings across Queensland. It is estimated that approximately 500 dwellings are either in very poor condition or inhabitable.

Supporting the repair and use of empty houses owned by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community housing providers will increase the number of dwellings available for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander tenants.

6. Limit rent increases

In the current extraordinary circumstances of high private market rent inflation, the Queensland Government should relieve pressure on low-income households by restricting rent increases.

7. Support from the Commonwealth Government

The housing crisis cannot be solved by the Queensland Government alone. The Queensland Government should ensure that Queenslanders benefit fairly from any Commonwealth Government investment in social and affordable housing.

The Queensland Government should:

- advocate for a rental subsidy scheme to be funded by the Commonwealth Government so that Queenslanders living in National Rental Affordability Scheme houses do not face housing insecurity
- ensure funds through the recently announced Housing Australia Future Fund are maximised by contributing landholdings toward schemes to be supported through the fund.

The Commonwealth Government should also increase Commonwealth Rent Assistance by 50 per cent. Increasing the JobSeeker payment above the poverty line would also lift almost 200,000 Queenslanders and their children out of poverty and relieve cost of living pressures so that people on income support can afford to keep a roof over their head.

