

Southern Homelessness Services Network Submission to the Senate Economics Legislation Committee Inquiry into National Housing and Homelessness Plan Bill 2024 (No. 2)

Introduction

The Southern Homelessness Services Network (SHSN) welcomes this opportunity to make a submission to the Senate Inquiry into the National Housing and Homelessness Plan (NHHP) Bill 2024. The SHSN has long been advocating for the development of a National Housing and Homelessness Plan and our members enthusiastically contributed their views to the development of the Plan, as the Southern region of Melbourne has some of the highest numbers of people experiencing homelessness in Victoria, particularly in the outer South growth corridors.

Effective solutions require the time, the investment and the political will to really make a difference, particularly for people experiencing and/or at risk of homelessness. The SHSN is excited by the proposed Bill which provides the most effective policy platform for ending homelessness in Australia to date.

About the SHSN

The **Vision** of the Southern Homelessness Services Network (SHSN) is an end to homelessness in Southern Region of Melbourne.

The **Mission** of the “Victorian Homelessness Networks is to facilitate, inform and support regional homelessness services and stakeholders to work together to co-ordinate services to people who are experiencing or who are at risk of homelessness.”

The Southern Homelessness Services Network (SHSN) comprises all funded Specialist Homelessness Services in the Southern Region of Melbourne including services providing crisis, transitional, long term, family violence and youth support and accommodation. Our members include Launch Housing, the Salvation Army, NEAMI, Wayss, Sacred Heart Mission and South East Community Links. The SHSN also supports allied service sectors working in homelessness. The SHSN is a resource for the homelessness sector in the South. More information about the SHSN can be found on our website <https://www.shsnetwork.online/>

The key strategic objectives of the SHSN are:

1. Working together to end homelessness.
2. Acting as a conduit between the DFFH (Dept of Families, Fairness and Housing) and the regional services sector on issues and trends to inform policy
3. Strengthening the coordinated homelessness service system in the best interests of clients

The Southern Region comprises ten local government areas in Southern Melbourne - Bayside, Cardinia, Casey, Frankston, Glen Eira, Greater Dandenong, Kingston, Mornington Peninsula, Port Phillip and Stonnington (see Figure 1).

This is a geographically and socio-economically diverse region.

Figure 1 Map of Melbourne's Southern Region Local Government Areas



The National Housing and Homelessness Plan Bill 2024

The SHSN strongly supports the Bill and the objects of this Act. The SHSN believes that the mechanisms proposed in the Bill will provide a far more effective platform for ending homelessness in Australia than the current policy settings.

Traditionally housing in Australia has been treated as a commodity and an investment. It is a competitive market good, not a public good or a human right. This perspective on housing contrasts with other more progressive countries where housing is more commonly provided by governments as a fundamental service or social infrastructure essential to a functioning economy and society. The Australian view of housing is difficult to change given our history. It is a large part of the reason for the current housing emergency at all levels – home ownership, private rental and social housing. Recognising housing as a human right in Federal legislation would start this process of change, providing the enablers for ending homelessness in Australia.

The SHSN supports the legislation of the NHHP to give the plan the long term approach needed to solve such an entrenched social and economic problem. This approach will ensure that future Governments maintain their commitment to the National Housing and Homelessness Plan.

The SHSN supports the content for the NHHP proposed in the Bill, in particular the following directions which would have the greatest impact on ending homelessness:

- ensuring that everyone in Australia has adequate housing
- preventing and ending homelessness
- ensuring the social housing system meets needs and drives wider housing system improvement

The SHSN supports the exploration of all Commonwealth policy levers affecting homelessness, including tax policy and income support policy, rather than a narrow focus on homelessness programs and social housing provision. This perspective will shift Australia towards a more equitable society and enable Governments to address the root causes of homelessness.

The approach outlined in this Bill will bring in the expertise required to solve this complex socio-economic issue, including experts from the homelessness sector, policy experts and academics with the establishment of the National Housing Supply and Affordability Council.

The SHSN believes that people with lived experience of homelessness are the experts on homelessness. The SHSN is pleased to see the inclusion of National Housing Consumer Council to provide consumer perspectives to the Housing Minister and ensure the NHHP meets the needs of people with lived experience of homelessness and housing insecurity.

The SHSN supports the clear processes and accountability in this Bill which will provide a robust policy response and evaluation mechanisms for the NHHP, including review approach and establishment of the National Housing and Homelessness Advocate to monitor progress on the plan and investigate systemic issues relating to housing and homelessness.

SHSN submission to the development of the National Housing and Homelessness Plan

The SHSN made a substantial submission to the development of the National Housing and Homelessness Plan (attached for the Senate Committee's information and available at shsnetwork.online/files/ugd/776f42_6d09f72d3d0844729f23147d94ac6a11.pdf). This Bill reflects many of the recommendations and policy solutions put forward in the SHSN submission.

The Southern Homelessness Services Network made the following recommendations to the National Housing and Homelessness Plan:

Recommendation 1. The National Housing and Homelessness Plan should be a bold, comprehensive strategy that sets out a clear, committed and planned approach to ending homelessness in Australia.

Recommendation 2. The National Housing and Homelessness Plan should commit to clear targets, for example, to halve homelessness in five years and to end homelessness in ten years.

Recommendation 3. The National Housing and Homelessness Plan should focus on reducing poverty as a critical broad-ranging strategy to preventing and ending homelessness in Australia.

Recommendation 4. The National Housing and Homelessness Plan should focus on ensuring the supply of safe and appropriate public and community housing at the scale required to meet demand for people on the lowest incomes, including people experiencing, and at risk of, homelessness.

Recommendation 5. The National Housing and Homelessness Plan should ensure that the homelessness service system and workforce is well-resourced to provide flexible and responsive support to meet the actual demand for homelessness assistance.

Recommendation 6. The National Housing and Homelessness Plan should be responsive to the needs of different cohorts experiencing homelessness, whilst recognising and responding to intersectionality.

Recommendation 7. The National Housing and Homelessness Plan should include the provision of effective evidence-based models at the scale required, to prevent, intervene early and end homelessness, including authentic Housing First models.

Recommendation 8. The National Housing and Homelessness Plan should include strategies for all human services to take responsibility for supporting their service users at risk of/experiencing homelessness.

Conclusion

Most “solutions” to the housing crisis put forward do not assist people on the lowest incomes, especially those put forward by the housing and development industries. Solutions that worked in the past are not working well now because of the low availability of rental housing and escalating rents. The SHSN is keen to focus on solutions that benefit the most marginalised Australians – those at the lowest end of the housing market – people at risk of and/or experiencing homelessness. This group should be the priority in the NHHP. Once we have implemented solutions for this most marginalised group, then we can focus on improving the housing market for other groups.

The SHSN strongly supports this Bill as providing the most effective policy mechanisms and processes for Australia to end homelessness and provide safe, affordable homes where Australians can thrive.