

Submission re the National Housing and Homelessness Plan Bill 2024 (No. 2)

August 2024

Mission Australia welcomes the opportunity to comment on the National Housing and Homelessness Plan Bill 2024 (No. 2).

Mission Australia is an organisation dedicated to ending homelessness and ensuring that people and communities in need can thrive. In 2022-23 we delivered 460 programs and services across the country, supporting over 149,000 people.

We deliver a wide range of direct housing and homelessness supports. These include Specialist Homelessness Services, tenancy support, residential aged care, and specialist housing support services. These services are complemented by a range of other services such as mental health services, residential alcohol and drug rehabilitation services, domestic and family violence services and other children and family services.

In addition, in 2009, Mission Australia established Mission Australia Housing (MAH), a Tier 1 Community Housing Provider. MAH now owns or manages over 4,000 social and affordable homes across Australia.

Support for the proposed legislation

Mission Australia supports the intent of the National Housing and Homelessness Plan Bill 2024 (No. 2).

We agree with our housing and homelessness peak bodies – Homelessness Australia, National Shelter, and the Community Housing Industry Association - that the National Housing and Homelessness Plan (Plan) should be legislated. We expressed this as a signatory to an open letter to the former Minister for Housing and Homelessness, Minister Collins, in which we noted that:

- A National Housing and Homelessness Plan Act should be passed by the Federal Parliament, obligating the responsible Minister of the day to implement such a Plan, with defined overarching objectives, and report to Parliament on its progress.
- Taking a cue from the Canadian National Housing Strategy Act 2019, the legislation should be founded on Australia's international obligations to realise the human right to adequate housing.
- The Act should nominate agencies to lead, advise on and monitor the Plan and other housing policy issues, including a consumer voice to advise on current housing problems, and an accountability agency to investigate progress and emerging housing policy issues.

We submit that legislating a statutory basis for the Plan would be an effective mechanism for establishing governance and accountability structures that would contribute to ending homelessness and ensuring that all Australians have access to a safe, secure and affordable home.

The Government of the day would remain responsible for setting direction and developing the Plan, but this proposed legislation would provide the framework in which the Plan would be designed and governed. Importantly, it would mandate the development and renewal of a Plan, the absence of which has contributed to Australia's current housing and homelessness emergency.

Some of the key issues from our perspective are set out below.

10-year Plan with established review processes

It has been more than 15 years since Australia last developed a comprehensive national policy on homelessness, and over 30 years since a national housing policy was released.¹ In the years since, the housing and homelessness systems have largely been left on 'set and forget'; unresponsive to a brewing housing and homelessness crisis which has now grown into a chronic and compounding emergency.

In our view, mandating the Federal Government to develop and maintain a 10-year Plan, to report regularly on progress against the Plan and to review it at timely intervals would be an effective way of ensuring a coordinated, well-resourced and responsive approach to ensuring adequate housing for all Australians.

Human rights approach

Mission Australia supports taking a rights-based approach to housing. Our submission to the Plan consultations suggested that *Everyone has the right to a safe and secure home* should be an underpinning principle of the Plan. We support the inclusion of this approach in the proposed legislation.

Lived experience

The Bill would establish a National Housing Consumer Council to advise on the Plan and give lived experience perspectives on its progress. This accords with our strongly-held view that people with lived experience of homelessness and housing precarity should be involved in co-designing all aspects of a systems approach to housing and homelessness.

Embedding accountability

In the absence of a national strategy or plans driving a strong policy intent to end homelessness and increase housing affordability, previous National Housing and Homelessness Agreements have been the mainstay of joint Federal-State efforts to address homelessness. These are predominantly funding documents with inadequate reporting requirements and few incentives to achieve positive outcomes, and as such have lacked clear accountability structures. This has created a challenging environment to hold parties to account and, at an implementation level, to make informed decisions on what should be continued, scaled up or down, or stopped.

The proposed legislation addresses this through provisions mandating the Minister report to Parliament, that the Plan be reviewed and fully refreshed on a 10-year cycle, and by establishing governance arrangements – including a new National Housing and Homelessness Advocate - to report on systemic issues and progress.

¹ The Road Home, A National Approach to Reducing Homelessness (2008) and the National Housing Strategy (1992)

Conclusion

Legislating a statutory basis for the Plan would be an important step in providing a coherent framework for ending homelessness and ensuring adequate housing for all in Australia. Further detail on our views on the structure and content of the Plan itself can be found in Mission Australia's 2023 [submission](#) to the Plan consultations.

Contact

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