



## Maximise the Benefits of the Big Housing Build

CHIA Vic acknowledges the historical funding commitment made by the Andrew's Government to grow the social housing system, with \$5.3B committed to new social housing units being built over the next five years. The community housing sector was allocated 2,352 units in the Rapid Round and the Regional Round is currently live, soon to be followed by the Aboriginal Round.

CHIA Vic's budget submission for 2022 focuses on the architecture of the housing system and, in particular, the support required to maximise the benefits of the Big Housing Build.

### Homeless to Home

During the height of COVID the Andrew's Government made a significant investment to provide a pathway for eligible people who were temporarily placed in emergency accommodation during the 2020 Covid -19 lockdown to transition from emergency accommodation into more secure and affordable housing. There are 14 consortiums established across the state with housing and support organisations joining forces to deliver a tailored and responsive service based on the needs of individuals. The program design recognised the importance of matching the housing with the appropriate level of support. This tailored matching of renter/housing/support is what experts have been calling for within the social housing system. While the implementation of H2H did not always live up to the program design the bringing together of flexible support with appropriate housing is a philosophy and model that must be translated to the rest of the system.

### The Right Support at the Right Time

The provision of appropriate support to social housing tenants is currently ad hoc, inadequate and at times inappropriate. We believe that the support system requires an overhaul with greater investment, flexibility and targeting. In other sectors the concepts of choice and control are part of the system's design and well understood. However, they have not been translated to the housing and support system with artificial time periods of supports that have no relationship to the tenant's situation.

In particular, we are calling for a review of and further investment in the support system in order to provide:

1. Support funding and referral mechanisms that allows support agencies to establish a relationship with tenants and engage when needed, especially at the time they are allocated a home. This could include mental health, AOD, and other support providers who can help address issues that might put a household's tenancy at risk and provide a level of support that is needed at that time.
2. Enhanced tenancy support for all renters, and particularly for social housing tenants. Tenancy Plus is a specialised service to work with tenants when their tenancy is at risk or support is needed to establish successful tenancies primarily to public housing renters. Community housing

organisations report that long wait lists mean that support is unavailable when needed. An initial injection of funding to reduce wait lists will allow the Tenancy Plus service to assist more at risk tenants, reducing evictions and the higher costs of assisting these clients in the homelessness sector. Expanding the service also provides an opportunity to capture better data on the need, as currently there is poor data on the number of clients turned away. CHIA Vic also recommends that government invest in a review of the program's effectiveness with a view to improving the programs' ability to quickly respond to all social housing tenants and support tenancy sustainment. This could include consideration of how the program may be extended to those in private rental.

3. Support for the most complex tenancies. A specialist response is needed for the most complex renters, those with complex need are unable to sustain their tenancies despite support from existing services. Such renters may experience multiple periods of homelessness and cycle through crisis, transitional and long-term social housing. They are a very small percentage of the social housing population but attract a disproportionately high proportion of the sector's resources. They may often adversely impact their neighbours, and such disturbances can risk stigmatising social housing.

There is an existing DFFH program for the most complex public housing tenancies, Support for High Risk Tenancies (SfHRT), that is currently unavailable to community housing renters but could be expanded and enhanced to meet this need.

### **Reform the Victorian Housing Register (VHR)**

The VHR was implemented a few years ago to act as a common waiting list for public and community housing. It has been very successful in joining waiting lists but could be so much more. The VHR is due to be evaluated and the review should map out a 10 year program of improvements. Some of the areas that need attention in the first tranche of enhancements are:

- We have a disjointed process of allocating a home and the required support. At present a person may be categorised as homeless with support on the VHR but this does not mean that the person will have the required level of appropriate support to establish a tenancy successfully.
- The VHR has changed the way people register for social housing and has broken the connection between individual CHOs and applicants. We do not know the impact of this and the review should consider the needs of applicants in the registration process. For example, Aboriginal applicants who may want housing with Aboriginal Housing Victoria are no longer able to go to them directly to register.
- The VHR does not work effectively for co-ops, rooming houses and some mental health and youth programs as it is based on a public housing offering of long-term self-contained housing
- With affordable housing potentially being a growth area a simpler matching platform is required that has a non-government appearance – whether the VHR can become this should be explored in the review.

### **Launch the Ten Year Plan**

The Big Housing Build is a once in a generation investment in social housing but it will not solve Victoria's affordable housing crisis nor will it bring our social housing numbers up to the national average. We are looking to the ten year plan to position Victoria for long term, sustained growth. This budget could support the first in a series of rolling 4 year plans.

**The Community Housing Industry Association Victoria (CHIA Vic) is the peak body that represents the not-for-profit community housing sector in Victoria. CHIA Vic works to support the growth of community housing as the most effective and efficient means of ensuring more disadvantaged Victorians can enjoy the dignity of safe, secure and appropriate housing.**

**CHIA Vic's member community housing organisations (CHOs) include all the organisations registered as housing associations or housing providers under the Victorian regulatory framework. These registered CHOs make up an integral part of Victoria's social housing system, managing more than 20,000 units of rental property, over 10,000 of which are owned by CHOs.**

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