

 We acknowledge the Traditional Custodians of the land where we live and work and their continuing connection to land, water, sea and community. We pay respects to Australia's First Peoples, to their unique and diverse cultures, and to Elders past, present and future.

Inclusion is about the actions we take every day. We welcome, support, and celebrate diversity.

## Housing and homelessness

FINAL 29 August 2022

### About Social Futures

Social Futures is a not-for-profit operating in regional Australia for more than 46 years. Our service footprint reaches across more than 65 per cent of NSW, as well as the Gold Coast in South East Queensland. We are experts in tailoring programs to fit our diverse local communities. In 2020-21 we supported 20,517 participants across 23 programs.

This position statement reflects our role as a leading provider of homelessness and housing in Northern NSW, supporting more than 2,400 people experiencing homelessness or housing instability in 2020-21. Social Futures is exploring innovative affordable housing solutions. Our *McKenzie Lofts Project* has been impacted by the 2022 floods in Lismore and aims to deliver 12 affordable homes on completion.

A home is essential to support thriving people and strong communities. Housing markets are failing low-income and even middle-income households in regional Australia.

We need urgent investment in social and affordable housing in our regional communities to boost local and regional economies. Research conducted for Everybody's Home found constructing 25,000 social homes per year will generate annual economic output of \$12.9 billion and create 15,700 jobs<sup>1</sup>. Under-investment in social and affordable housing is costing the Australian economy \$676.5 million in foregone social and economic benefits each year<sup>2</sup>.

### What needs to change?

#### Australian and State Governments need to:

##### GENERAL

1. Deliver 25,000 more social homes per year nationally, with 12,000 in regional areas in acute rental stress (support *Everybody's Home campaign*).
2. Work with community and Aboriginal housing providers to improve funding arrangements and planning rules and build capacity so we can deliver housing by establishing a housing future fund.
3. Review tenancy laws and regulations to encourage longer-term leases, remove no-grounds terminations in NSW, and ensure rent increases are proportionate and fair.
4. Increase funding to homelessness support organisations so they can intervene early and support people before they become homeless. Direct this funding to communities where it is most needed.

##### SPECIFIC

5. Rehouse displaced people urgently after disasters, and work with communities and local governments on remediation and disaster mitigation actions for housing in high-risk locations (respecting connection to community and Country).
6. Strengthen Short Term Rental Accommodation (STRA) provisions to further reduce the number of days residential property can be leased as short-term rental accommodation in areas with very low private rental vacancy rates.
7. Prioritise social and affordable housing delivery on appropriate government land, including within mixed tenure and mixed-use development, and work with community housing providers and other stakeholders to prepare development proposals.

## Regional housing is in market failure

- The average private rental vacancy rate over the 12 months to February 2022 was 0.95% across regional NSW markets, and is extremely tight compared to 3.04% for Sydney<sup>3</sup>. Net migration from Sydney to regional NSW doubled from 2019 to 2020<sup>4</sup>.
- Median weekly rents across regional NSW increased by 11.1% from Dec 2020 to Dec 2021 quarters, compared to only 2.0% for Greater Metro Region. Ballina, Tweed, Lismore and Richmond Valley local government areas all increased by 20.0% or more<sup>5</sup>.
- Rental stress is high in Regional NSW (32.5%) compared to the rate for the whole of NSW (28.4%) and Australia (28%). In the Northern Rivers NSW 38.6% of renter households were in housing stress (2016 Census<sup>6</sup>).
- 2021 analysis on renter households found 68.7% in the Page Electorate and 44.6% in the Richmond Electorate were in financial stress<sup>7</sup>. Increasingly, essential workers cannot afford to rent in regional communities. This is putting our workforce and communities at risk<sup>8</sup>.
- Closing the Gap reporting shows that nationally in 2016, 78.9% of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people were living in appropriately sized (not overcrowded) housing, compared to 92.8% for non-Indigenous people<sup>9</sup>. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are over-represented in the national homeless population and as users of specialist homelessness services<sup>10</sup>.  
Anecdotal information from Social Futures staff, participants and communities indicates these national results are reflected in the experience of First Nations people in the regional communities Social Futures works in.
- NSW Government's street count in February 2022 identified 357 people experiencing street homelessness in Northern Rivers\* (30% of the total for NSW and more than Sydney)<sup>11</sup>.
- Research in 2019 found a further 99,700 dwellings will be required by 2036 to meet the need for social and affordable housing in regional NSW (outside of Greater Sydney). Prior to the catastrophic February 2022 floods Northern Rivers had an estimated shortfall of 10,000 social housing and 5,000 affordable housing dwellings<sup>12</sup>.

## The impact of disasters

Over 8100 homes were inundated, and more than 4000 homes deemed uninhabitable following the catastrophic February–March 2022 floods<sup>13</sup>, with most of these in Bundjalung Country in Northern Rivers. Social Futures estimates more than one in every 20 people in that region have been impacted by flooding in their homes<sup>14</sup>. This adds immense pressure to a private rental market that was already under critical stress before the 2019 bushfires and the Covid-19 pandemic driving record migration from Sydney and other urban areas<sup>15</sup>.

University Centre for Rural Health research following the 2017 Northern NSW floods found people displaced longer than six months were twice as likely to experience continued mental distress and symptoms of post-traumatic stress, anxiety and depression, compared to people more briefly displaced<sup>16</sup>.

In some communities in Bundjalung Country almost the whole population has been displaced. Among our First Nations communities many Elders have been displaced and had to move off Country, which impacts communities needing Elders' presence to keep and grow their culture.

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<https://everybodyshome.com.au/everybodys-home-a-plan-to-fix-australias-housing-crisis-federal-budget-2022/>

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.news.com.au/finance/real-estate/buying/time-bomb-housing-problem-costing-australian-communities-hundreds-of-millions-every-year/news-story/8c915292200ee854c173c8dc9f7a53d6#!inbc!pd!182fdc36ry6>

<sup>3</sup> REINSW 2022 <[https://www.reinsw.com.au/Web/Members/Property\\_data/Vacancy\\_Rates\\_Survey.aspx](https://www.reinsw.com.au/Web/Members/Property_data/Vacancy_Rates_Survey.aspx)>. Method: Monthly rental vacancy rate in each housing market is averaged over twelve months (to February 2022); then the 12-month results for all regional markets included in the REINSW survey were averaged. Result equals 0.95%. Does not include Newcastle, Hunter Other or Illawarra.

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.abs.gov.au/media-centre/media-releases/net-migration-regions-highest-record>

<sup>5</sup> NSW Department of Communities and Justice, Rent and Sales report, [https://public.tableau.com/app/profile/facs.statistics/viz/Rentandsales\\_15565127794310/Rent](https://public.tableau.com/app/profile/facs.statistics/viz/Rentandsales_15565127794310/Rent)

<sup>6</sup> 2016 ABS Census of Population and Housing data housing stress analysis sourced from Byron Shire Social Atlas, Profile Id. Definition of rental stress: renter households in the lowest 40% of household incomes paying more than 30% of their gross weekly income on housing costs.

<sup>7</sup> <https://everybodyshome.com.au/financial-stress-map-new-south-wales/>

<sup>8</sup> Social Futures, 2020 Early Intervention Connect program sector development needs assessment report.

<sup>9</sup> Closing the Gap Information Repository, <https://www.pc.gov.au/closing-the-gap-data/dashboard/socioeconomic/outcome-area9>.

<sup>10</sup> Australian Institute of Health and Welfare 2022, Australia's welfare – Indigenous housing, <https://www.aihw.gov.au/reports/australias-welfare/indigenous-housing>.

<sup>11</sup> NSW Department of Communities and Justice, 2021 street count results, <https://www.facs.nsw.gov.au/about/reforms/homelessness/premiers-priority-to-reduce-street-homelessness/street-count>. \*Byron Bay Shire result for 2022 excludes Brunswick Heads, Mullumbimby and surrounding areas as counts were unable to be completed in these areas due to extreme weather. Sydney recorded 351 persons in the 2022 count (includes SE and North Sydney).

<sup>12</sup> Based on research by UNSW City Futures Research Centre and Everybody's Home 2019 and Social Futures' estimated of increased demand 2019-2022.

<sup>13</sup> SES NSW telephone briefing to Social Futures Communications Advisor, April 2022.

<sup>14</sup> Based on average household size and Northern Rivers population.

<sup>15</sup> Net migration from Sydney to regional NSW doubled in 2020 <<https://www.abs.gov.au/media-centre/media-releases/net-migration-regions-highest-record>>.

<sup>16</sup> After The Flood Study, University Centre for Rural Health, [https://ucr.edu.au/wp-content/uploads/2020/08/UCRH-HSSI-Node-fact-sheet-completed-project\\_2020-final.pdf](https://ucr.edu.au/wp-content/uploads/2020/08/UCRH-HSSI-Node-fact-sheet-completed-project_2020-final.pdf)