



29 July 2019

Infrastructure SA

## Submission to Infrastructure SA Discussion Paper

Shelter SA welcomes the opportunity to contribute to the Infrastructure SA Discussion Paper (the Discussion Paper) and we hope that you will consider our submission. The aim of our submission is to ask you to consider including public housing as a form of infrastructure that plays an essential role in achieving economic goals and fulfilling the ethical imperative of ensuring that all South Australians have affordable, safe, secure and appropriate housing.

### Introduction

The annual target of 3% economic growth for the State is predicated on having appropriate population levels to be achieved through increased migration (offset by net losses of people moving interstate) and having infrastructure to both accommodate the population increase and be a catalyst for it.

Infrastructure provides economic and social opportunities, through access to markets, improving productivity and constituting assets that provide the services that make up our social fabric and enable our communities to thrive. We were pleased to read in the Discussion Paper that it is acknowledged that economic goals are entwined with social goals however, there is also an ethical dimension to the Infrastructure Plan.

Historically, the idea of housing as a basic human right, and the economic benefits that derive from it, were well understood in South Australia and provided the moral and economic imperative for significant investment into public housing building programs. The South Australian Housing Trust had a proud history and was once considered one of the best public housing systems in the world. The effect of investing in public housing was to stimulate the economy and meet our social goals. We seem to have lost sight of the importance of public housing as essential infrastructure and it is now only regarded as a form of welfare for people who are living with disadvantage.<sup>1 2</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.humanrights.gov.au/our-work/rights-and-freedoms/projects/housing-homelessness-and-human-rights>

<sup>2</sup> Lawson, J., Denham, T., Dodson, D., Flanagan, K., Jacobs, K., Martin, C., Van den Nouwelant, R., Pawson, H. and Troy, L. (2019) Social housing as infrastructure: rationale, prioritisation and investment pathway, AHURI Final Report No. 315, Australian Housing and Urban Research Institute Limited, Melbourne, <http://www.ahuri.edu.au/research/final-reports/315>, doi: 10.18408/ahuri-5314001.

Many people living in the bottom two household income quintiles have no choice but to try to survive in the private rental market as South Australia has lost more than 20,000 public housing properties over the last twenty years and the number of renters has grown four times faster than our population.<sup>3</sup> There has been an increase in the number of people living with rental stress (where more than 30% of household income is spent on rent) as it has almost doubled in the eight years from 22% in 2007-2008 to 39% in 2015-2016, which constitutes around 46,500 households.

Clearly, the supply of affordable private housing (whether private rental or home ownership) falls well short of the demand and the recent Strategic Intent published by the South Australian Housing Authority contains an objective of “supply matching demand” and which requires housing to be recognised as “core infrastructure”.

Not only is an increase in public housing necessary to redress the shortfall of affordable housing, an investment in public housing would play a vital role in facilitating the State Government’s economic growth target and offset the costs of addressing social problems that arise from the current housing situation as well as some of the potential costs and risks associated with the Infrastructure Plan.

The infrastructure response must include an increase in public housing. As part of our regional engagement strategy, we have visited a number of areas across the State (including Murray Bridge, Mt. Gambier, Port Lincoln, Port Augusta, Port Pirie, Mt. Barker) to conduct workshops. We found that the issues frequently raised were the incidence of homelessness, the lack of crisis accommodation (particularly for younger people), a lack of affordable housing and the increasing risk of homelessness due to lack of affordable housing.<sup>4</sup> <sup>5</sup> People who are either experiencing homelessness or at risk of becoming homeless are a highly vulnerable cohort for whom crisis accommodation and public housing are urgently required.

### **Public Housing as an Infrastructure Response**

It is stated in the Discussion Paper that there must be an infrastructure response to changing demographics in South Australia, such as an aging population, an increasingly urban population and the expansion of population outside of the Greater Adelaide region. It is also acknowledged in the Discussion Paper that there must also be infrastructure to “meet the future community needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples”.

If the aim is to “improve health, housing, education and employment outcomes for Aboriginal South Australians through community-appropriate land use planning and much needed infrastructure”,<sup>6</sup> then public housing must be considered essential infrastructure. We know that the First Peoples of Australia face significant barriers to accessing the private rental market, particularly due to racial discrimination.<sup>7</sup> Public housing infrastructure is a necessity if we are serious about improving

---

<sup>3</sup> Towards a Housing, Homelessness and Support Strategy – Strategic Intent: Taskforce Report to the Minister for Human Services, June 2019. [https://www.housing.sa.gov.au/\\_data/assets/pdf\\_file/0010/97480/Towards-a-Housing-Homelessness-and-Support-Strategy-Strategic-Intent.pdf](https://www.housing.sa.gov.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0010/97480/Towards-a-Housing-Homelessness-and-Support-Strategy-Strategic-Intent.pdf)

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.sheltersa.asn.au/site/wp-content/uploads/190527-Alice-Clark-Oped.pdf>

<sup>5</sup> Blue Sky Thinking: Adelaide Hills Report (Forthcoming)

<sup>6</sup> As stated on page 14 of the Discussion Paper

<sup>7</sup> <https://www.sheltersa.asn.au/site/wp-content/uploads/190430-Shelter-SA-Research-Report-on-Racial-Discrimination-in-Private-Rental-FINAL.pdf>

outcomes for this highly vulnerable and marginalised cohort and enabling them to contribute to the economic growth target.<sup>8</sup>

It is highlighted in the Discussion Paper, South Australia's dependency on migrants for population growth and as a source of skilled labour, especially international students. Shelter SA welcomes international students and migrants however, an investment in public housing, to properly house the more than 20,000 South Australians experiencing homelessness every year and the 45,000 households living with housing stress, which constitutes much more than the net population target of 6,000 people, would have a greater effect on the economy than a sole focus on students and migrants. Not only would an investment in public housing lead to increased housing security and easing of rental stress for these cohorts, it would have significant positive economic flow-on effects including greater household spending and consumption and greater demand for products and services. Better housing for our citizens would also lead to increased workplace productivity and facilitate the development of a source of skilled labour.

It is highlighted in the Discussion Paper the need to support our justice system and emergency services across the State through implementing transitioning solutions linked to employment and housing programs. Public housing is a crucial infrastructure requirement for people leaving prison who are at high risk of homelessness, which in turn can lead to recidivism.<sup>9 10</sup> Stable, affordable housing is associated with staying out of prison and increased social integration.<sup>11</sup>

## Summary

Public housing provides a crucial safety net for vulnerable Australians, especially those who are experiencing homelessness or at risk of homelessness. It is time to cease considering the housing South Australian need as a welfare measure and include it as essential infrastructure. Public housing leads to a wide range of economic and social benefits such as increased employment, education, community participation, better health outcomes, and reduced crime and incarceration rates.<sup>12 13</sup>

---

<sup>8</sup> Nicola Brackertz, Alex Wilkinson (2017), Research synthesis of social and economic outcomes of good housing for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander People, Report, viewed 14 July 2019, <https://www.nintione.com.au/?p=10867>

<sup>9</sup> <https://www.corrections.sa.gov.au/Rehabilitation-education-and-work/access-to-housing>

<sup>10</sup> <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2018-08-07/former-inmate-calls-for-more-affordable-housing/10077510>

<sup>11</sup> Baldry, E., McDonnell, D., Maplestone, P., Peeters, M. (2003) Ex-prisoners and accommodation: what bearing do different forms of housing have on social reintegration, AHURI Final Report No. 46, Australian Housing and Urban Research Institute Limited, Melbourne, <https://www.ahuri.edu.au/research/final-reports/46>

<sup>12</sup> Flatau, P., Wood, L., Zaretsky, K., Foster, S., Vallesi, S. and Miscenko, D. (2016) The economic benefits of providing public housing and support to formerly homeless people, AHURI Research and Policy Bulletin No. 215, Australian Housing and Urban Research Institute Limited, Melbourne,

<https://www.ahuri.edu.au/research/research-and-policy-bulletins/215>; Brackertz, N., Wilkinson, A., and Davison, J. (2019) Trajectories: the interplay between mental health and housing pathways. A short summary of the evidence., AHURI Research Paper, Australian Housing and Urban Research Institute Limited, Melbourne, <https://www.ahuri.edu.au/research/research-papers/trajectories-the-interplay-between-mental-health-and-housing-pathways>; Housing Assistance and Employment in Australia: Productivity Commission Research Paper (2015) <https://www.pc.gov.au/research/completed/housing-employment/housing-employment-volume1.pdf>; [https://www.nhc.edu.au/wp-content/uploads/2017/12/1201\\_0900\\_C2.06\\_NHA17\\_Panel\\_Nicki-Hutley.pdf](https://www.nhc.edu.au/wp-content/uploads/2017/12/1201_0900_C2.06_NHA17_Panel_Nicki-Hutley.pdf); <https://www.forbes.com/sites/deborahaltbot/2018/05/15/making-the-connection-between-social-housing-and-economic-growth/#328f5a7722af>

<sup>13</sup> Notwithstanding the negative spin born out of illegitimate and highly speculative claims as to there being evidence otherwise. The following articles exemplify the kind of negative spin that exists: <https://theconversation.com/social-housing-protects-against-homelessness-but-other-benefits-are-less-clear->

There are also flow-on effects of reduced expenditure on a range of expensive services including hospital, mental health facilities, incarceration and the child protection system.<sup>14</sup> Of course, the benefits attributable to public housing are typically not measured or traded in markets.<sup>15 16</sup> However, they are there to be reaped and conferred across all of the sector categories mentioned in the Discussion Paper. We look forward to reading the other submissions to the Discussion Paper and the outcomes of your consultation. Please contact us if you require any further information.

Yours faithfully

**Dr Alice Clark**  
**Executive Director**  
**Shelter SA**  
**The South Australian peak body for housing**



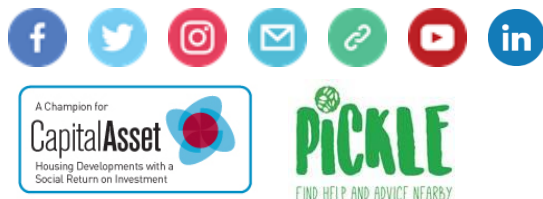
[DELETED]

@DrAliceClark on Twitter

PO Box 6207 Halifax Street Adelaide SA 5000

Unit 44/81 Carrington Street Adelaide SA 5000

*We acknowledge and respect the Kurna people as the traditional custodians of the ancestral lands we live and work on and their deep feelings of attachment and relationship to country.*



97446; <https://www.infrastructurevictoria.com.au/wp-content/uploads/2019/04/Infrastructure-Victoria-Technical-Paper-%E2%80%93-What-are-the-impacts-of-living-in-social-housing-May-2018.pdf>

<sup>14</sup> Introducing Competition and Informed User Choice into Human Services: Reforms to Human Services: Productivity Inquiry Report (2017) <https://www.pc.gov.au/inquiries/completed/human-services/reforms/report/human-services-reforms.pdf>

<sup>15</sup> Lawson, J., Denham, T., Dodson, D., Flanagan, K., Jacobs, K., Martin, C., Van den Nouwelant, R., Pawson, H. and Troy, L. (2019) Social housing as infrastructure: rationale, prioritisation and investment pathway, AHURI Final Report No. 315, Australian Housing and Urban Research Institute Limited, Melbourne, <http://www.ahuri.edu.au/research/final-reports/315>, doi: 10.18408/ahuri-5314001

<sup>16</sup> The government must therefore be willing to adopt an “avoided costs” methodology as part of the cost-benefit analysis of social housing.