

Ms Wendy Lindsay MP
Chair, Legislative Assembly Committee on Community Services
NSW Parliament

13 August 2021



Dear Legislative Assembly Committee on Community Services,

Options to improve access to existing and alternate accommodation to address the social housing shortage

Thank you for the opportunity to provide a submission to the committee on this matter.

The Public Interest Advocacy Centre (PIAC) is a leading social justice law and policy centre. We are an independent, non-profit organisation that works with people and communities who are marginalised and facing disadvantage. In 2004, PIAC established the Homeless Persons' Legal Service (HPLS). HPLS provides free legal advice at 16 legal advice clinics in the Sydney and Hunter regions. HPLS has provided legal assistance to more than 8,000 people who are homeless or at risk of homelessness, on over 11,000 occasions. In 2019-20, we worked with over 665 clients.

HPLS endorses the submission made by Homelessness NSW, the peak body for the homelessness sector. This letter outlines the specific concerns we have about focusing on providing more insecure housing options at the expense of planning for adequate investment in social housing and support services for people experiencing homelessness.

The lack of affordable, appropriate housing is the primary reason our clients experience homelessness. As of 30 June, 2020, there were 52,752 applicants on the NSW Housing Register (Productivity Commission, 2021). Last year, the number of applicants on the priority list for housing increased by over 800.

The most cost efficient and straightforward way to create adequate long-term housing options for people experiencing homelessness is to deliver more social housing. Facilitating 'meanwhile use' housing might benefit a handful of people, but it does not add to the availability of long-term social housing stock.

We have specific concerns about:

1. The standard and quality of this sort of temporary housing. While we have limited information about the type of accommodation that will be offered under a 'meanwhile use' policy, we believe many vacant sites will not be appropriate to host temporary accommodation for people with complex needs, and potentially unsafe. We also have concerns about the oversight and quality control of these properties.
2. The level of support that will be provided. People accessing new temporary supported accommodation are likely to have complex needs and will require support that is intensive, trauma informed and client centred. Specialist homelessness services will need additional funding if they are to be responsible for the delivery of this support.
3. 'Meanwhile use' approaches are inconsistent with best practice housing and homelessness policy. Researchers and housing and homelessness experts overwhelmingly agree that the solutions to homelessness are based on 'Housing First' principles; providing safe, adequate housing

Level 5, 175 Liverpool St
Sydney NSW 2000
Phone: 61 2 8898 6500
Fax: 61 2 8898 6555
www.piac.asn.au
ABN: 77 002 773 524

with support services to people experiencing homelessness, not more insecure accommodation.

Thank you for considering our views. Please do not hesitate to contact Thomas Chailloux, Policy Officer, if you require any further information. Thomas can be reached on 0490 030 809 or by email at tchailloux@piac.asn.au.

Yours sincerely

Kira Levin
Managing Solicitor
Homeless Persons Legal Service