



SUBMISSION TO INFRASTRUCTURE VICTORIA'S 30 YEAR STRATEGY

Housing for the Aged Action Group is a community based organisation specialising in the housing needs of older people. The organisation was formed just over 30 years ago and today has over 500 members that actively campaign for housing justice.

This submission to the Infrastructure Victoria's 30 year strategy is responding to the aspects of the strategy regarding housing, in particular, the Draft Options Book Version 2, extract relating to Need 7 – Provide better access to housing for the most vulnerable Victorians.

Overall comments

Housing for the Aged Action Group strongly supports the recognition by Infrastructure Victoria that there is need for immediate and decisive action on housing for low income Victorians. We support the statement that “major investment in dedicated affordable housing over the next 30 years, and particularly in the next ten, is essential to ensure that our most vulnerable Victorians have access to one of our most fundamental needs – shelter.” (pg 4 Infrastructure Victoria draft 30 year infrastructure strategy).

We strongly support the sentiment expressed in the 30-year draft plan that although the cost for this housing will be significant, not acting will come at an even greater cost to society and the economy.

Options we fully support

Affordable housing inclusionary controls (AHR) – we strongly support mandated planning provisions to increase supply of affordable housing developments in areas that have access to transport, health and is integrated with other housing types.

Residential Tenancies reform (RTR) – we support reform to the Residential Tenancies Act to allow security of tenure through longer leases.

Affordable housing infrastructure plan (SCP) – we support the development of a 30-year infrastructure plan, led by an overarching affordable housing strategy. We believe that this infrastructure plan must include the needs of older people in particular with specific targets to address the long term housing for this every-increasing cohort of the Victorian population.

Social housing stock expansion (SHE) – we support the provision of 50000 additional subsidised housing dwellings owned and operated by state government.

Affordable housing sector planning system amendment (SHS1) – we support a planning scheme amendment, with community issues incorporated into decision making, to fast track affordable housing. This should only apply to affordable housing developments, to act as an incentive. Universal housing designs should be mandated in all planning schemes.

Strategic transit-oriented centres and corridors (STO) – we support affordable housing that is integrated into existing public transport network infrastructure, as it allows older people to maintain connections.

Compact urban development (UDC) – we support development of affordable housing in areas that have existing transport, social and health infrastructure.

Options we partially support

Affordable private rental stock provision (ARH) – we support the provision of 20000 new dwellings, operated by community housing sector (with reservations regarding management by community housing – see comments below relating to SHS3 and SHG). However, we have reservations about private rental options due to the Residential Tenancies Act which does not provide long term housing security.

Crisis housing provision expansion (CHP) – although we recognise there is an undersupply of crisis housing, we will only support an increase in this type of housing if there is a) exit options into long term housing; and b) appropriate to the needs of older people, especially those who may be escaping elder abuse. We are concerned that an increase in funding for crisis housing may give rise to “slum landlords” who take advantage of both government funding and desperate people in need of accommodation.

Housing rental assistance and advocacy program extension (HRA) – we will only support this option if there are changes to the Residential Tenancies Act to allow long term and secure tenure.

Public Housing asset rationalisation and refurbishment (SHA) – we support the refurbishment of public housing, and urge the adoption of universal housing design for any refurbishment. We do not support the transfer of ownership of public assets to non-government or private providers. Our view is based on current housing justice benchmarks assessment we have conducted (detailed analysis can be provided if required).

Transitional accommodation stock expansion (TSA) – we only support an increase in transitional housing if there are adequate exit points. We recognise the need for support workers to assist in establishing long term housing outcomes, and this should be linked with any increase in transitional housing stock expansion.

Options we do not support

Affordable housing development incentives (SAH) – although we support incentives to increase affordable housing development (see AHR), we do not believe that they should be voluntary. Voluntary incentives have proven to be ineffective overseas and in the past.

Social housing utilising the Defence Housing Australia rental model (SHD1) – we support government housing holding its own assets, rather than selling to private enterprises and renting them back.

Social housing government role change (SHG) – we believe that government should maintain its role as developer and manager of social housing, rather than becoming simply a regulator and funder. We believe that social housing providers need more regulation to ensure standards and the needs of vulnerable people are met. We believe that there will always be a social responsibility for

government in providing housing for people with complex needs or on low incomes, as it is not always cost effective to do so, and therefore community housing providers and private enterprise cannot be relied upon to meet these needs.

Social housing tenant transition to private stock (SHP2) – we don't support this option, because it makes the paternalistic assumption that social and public housing tenants simply require training and support, rather than secure and affordable housing. Private tenancy does not provide secure and affordable housing, no matter how well trained and supported tenants are, and so are not an appropriate pathway.

Social housing stock transfer model (SHS3) – We don't support this option as we don't believe that the government currently has a high level of oversight of the sectors tenancy management and governance. This economic model relies upon the Commonwealth Rent Assistance subsidy, which is not necessarily guaranteed into the future, and cannot support tenants on low incomes. Until community housing providers are able to provide the same standards as public housing provides (in terms of rent, maintenance, security of tenure) then we cannot support more stock transfers.

Older Person's Housing Strategy

The Older Person's Housing Strategy was developed by a coalition of non-government organisations concerned about the increasing housing affordability crisis facing our ageing population. These organisations include Housing for the Aged Action Group, Council on the Ageing Victoria, Fair Go for Pensioners, Ethnic Communities of Victoria, Seniors Rights Victoria, Elder Rights Advocacy, Australian Network for Universal Design, and Wintringham. It is due to be released on 17 November 2016.

Recommendations from this strategy support some of the options outlined in the draft strategy paper:

1. Increase investment in public and social housing for older people, particularly in areas that allow maintenance of social networks, access to transport, health and other services (draft options AHR, SCP, SHC, SHS1, STO, UDC)
2. Consider longer tenure leases and rental controls in the private market (RTR)
3. Improve regulation of social and community housing providers, to ensure that the access to affordable housing and tenancy management is transparent and accountable
4. Retrospectively modify existing public and social housing stock to universal design standards (SHA)

Our recommendations that are not addressed in the draft 30-year strategy include:

1. Increase two bedroom housing stock, to allow unpaid carers and family to be accommodated
2. Embed an older persons' specialist housing worker in every housing and homelessness service (the need for long-term support is alluded to in draft option TSA)
3. Expand the Assistance with Care and Housing Program
4. Ensure minimum access features in the National Construction Code for all newly built and extensively modified housing, including simple features of universal access

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