

# **Inner West Council Housing and Affordability Advisory Committee**

## **Submission on Draft Healthy Ageing Strategy 2021-25 and Action Plan**

Disclaimer: This submission reflects the views of the named Committee members only, not the Inner West Council.

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Thanks to Jon Atkins.

Friday September 17, 2021.

### **Housing Affordability Advisory Committee (HAAC)**

The Housing Affordability Advisory Committee (HAAC) is a standing committee of the Inner West Council.

Members are drawn from the community and act in a voluntary capacity. The current membership is David Collins-White (Chairperson), Hazel Blunden, Michael Zanardo, Rachael Haggett, Ashwin Parameswaran and Paul Adabie. This submission reflects the views of the HAAC members only, and do not represent the views of the Inner West Council.

This submission will comment on the Inner West Council's Draft Healthy Ageing Strategy 2021-25 and Action Plan as it pertains to housing. We provide practical suggestions - see recommendations at the end of the document.

## **Scope of submission**

This submission comments on the Draft Healthy Ageing Strategy (the Strategy) and Action Plan. We limit ourselves to commenting on its housing aspects (Strategic Focus Area 3 of the Strategy and the corresponding actions contained in the Action Plan).

## **Bridging the local affordable housing gap**

There are two groups of vulnerable older persons in the Inner West Council (IWC) area:

- Older women with no housing assets: where women have left a relationship later in life, or are single, they often find themselves with reduced resources, small amounts of superannuation, and on low incomes, living in unaffordable rental accommodation. When equity in a home cannot be accessed, this can mean old age marked by poverty.
- Older men with no housing assets: While older men tend to have more resources/property assets, the inner west is home to many older men – in particular single older men with vulnerabilities who may be unable to work, are ageing, and residing in the Inner West's boarding houses.

While it is laudable that Council has recognised that older women are increasingly making up a larger proportion of persons experiencing homelessness, there has not been an adequate response from Commonwealth and State levels of government to meet growing housing needs of older people in general. Practical action is required to extend Council's powers to levy affordable housing contributions while, at the same time, Council can continue to lobby the Commonwealth and NSW Governments to increase social housing supply.

As Council is aware, it has the opportunity to levying affordable housing contributions certain precincts if named in *State Environmental Planning Policy No. 70 – Affordable Housing (Revised Schemes)* (SEPP 70). Once affordable housing stock is added to Council's portfolio, it/or its contracted housing manager can allocate housing stock based on a number of criteria, which are currently based on employment and local connection to the community.

Council's Affordable Rental Housing Program (ARHP) is a 'key worker' program that aims to provide affordable housing for a fixed term to workers in housing stress who are residents of the Inner West and employed full-time in essential jobs and emergency services. These workers are not eligible for social housing provided by the NSW government or the community housing sector and other not-for-profit providers. Given the selection criteria and intent of the ARHP, this 'key worker' program is not specifically designed to cater for the accommodation needs of older women which tend to be better served by social housing.

## **Government action to increase social and affordable housing supply**

As recommended by the Strategy, to address the fundamental needs of older people, including older women, Council needs to join with other councils and stakeholders to 'advocate to the NSW Government for increased supply of social and affordable housing for older people' (as Focus Area 3 of the draft Strategy states).

Much has been written on the need for more social housing and the benefits it brings<sup>1</sup>. Providing housing support for older people, including older women, on very low, low and moderate incomes, is predominantly tied to the availability of social housing. As a result, the main response needs to come from the Federal and NSW governments, i.e. via a commitment by governments to dramatically increase the provision of social housing through capital investment.

While Council should lobby all levels of government and all parties, it should lobby those who may be best placed to actually make a difference, e.g. the Member for Grayndler as potential Prime Minister, and the ALP more generally.

The Federal Coalition has repeatedly demonstrated antipathy to social housing (see for example, see the Member for Mackellar, Jason Falinski's comments<sup>2</sup> that social housing, which he referred to as 'housing commission', "has had a lot of negative impact on vulnerable communities and I query whether building it actually helps people in challenged communities").

In contrast, a Labor government, should they be elected, have committed to \$10b for 20,000 new social housing units over five years. While better than nothing, this is clearly insufficient, given that there were approximately 51,000 applicants – or 110,000 people – currently on the waitlist for social housing in NSW as of 2020, some of whom have waited for more than 10 years. More needs to be done.

### **Increasing the provision of affordable housing through the planning system**

The NSW government through the planning system could also implement a more comprehensive approach to the provision of affordable housing. In particular, an inclusionary zoning approach that requires a contribution from all development across local government areas should be embraced as a key mechanism in NSW, supplemented by a value capture approach as entailed by SEPP.<sup>3</sup>

As well, councils could be given an elevated role if affordable housing levies were easier to apply to new multi-unit developments (not just in certain 'precincts' that have to be approved by the NSW Government).

*State Environmental Planning Policy (Housing for Seniors or People with a Disability) 2004* is to be rolled into the new Housing SEPP. The new Housing SEPP draft needs to include a clause requiring at least 10% of vertical villages seniors accommodation to be affordable housing (a provision currently in the SEPP HSPD).

While boarding houses continue to provide a source of accommodation of older single people, the *Boarding Houses Act 2012* merely regulates this sector, rather than adding anything to supply. HAAC supports the Healthy Ageing Strategy in encouraging Council to continue to engage with the legislative review process, but it should also focus on the changes to the new Housing SEPP which mandates affordable rent levels and community housing management – a welcome development.

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<sup>1</sup> Refer to Homelessness NSW, [A Plan for Change: Homes for Older Women](#), February 2016 and CHIA, [New Modelling Shows Ongoing Benefits from Investment in Social Housing](#), 20 June 2021.

<sup>2</sup> See article in the *Sydney Morning Herald* reporting on Jason Falinski's comments: <https://www.smh.com.au/national/nsw/smells-like-rent-control-housing-affordability-inquiry-chair-rubbishes-affordable-housing-20210909-p58qbe.html>

<sup>3</sup> SGS Economics and Planning, [Review of infrastructure contributions in NSW issues paper](#), submission to the NSW Productivity Commissioner, August 2020.

## **Recommendations**

That IWC:

1. Explore the extent of housing stress among the two vulnerable groups of older residents (i) older women who have no housing assets and may have suffered a relationship break up and have little to no superannuation or savings; (ii) older men who have no housing assets and may be in marginal or substandard housing/boarding houses
2. Quantify how much social housing is required to assist these demographics
3. Identify new opportunities for seniors housing in the LGA, and potential partner organisations with landholdings, including charities and NGOs
4. Lobby the State Government to increase inclusionary zoning powers so Council can increase its housing portfolio
5. Lobby the ALP and Member for Grayndler to reconsider stated social housing commitments so expenditure and numbers of new social housing dwellings are increased to meet the needs of more households, including ageing persons.

We thank IWC for this chance to comment on the draft Strategy and look forward to seeing the final document.