Anglicare Australia
in every Community

Submission to the Senate Economics References Committee Inquiry on Social Housing

September 2026

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About Anglicare Australia

Anglicare Australia is a network of independent local, state, national and international organisations that are linked to the Anglican Church and are joined by values of service, innovation, leadership and the Christian faith that every individual has intrinsic value. Our services are delivered in partnership with people, the communities in which they live, and other like-minded organisations in those areas. With a combined income of $3.1 billion, a workforce of over 23,000 staff and 8,000 volunteers, the Network delivers more than 50 service areas in the Australian community. In all, Anglicare services reach almost one in every twenty Australians.

As part of its mission the Anglicare Australia Network partners with people, families and communities to provide services and advocacy and build resilience, inclusion and justice. Our first strategic goal charges us with reaching this by influencing social and economic policy across Australia with a strong prophetic voice; informed by research and the practical experience of the Network.

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Introduction

Anglicare Australia welcomes the opportunity to make a submission to the Senate Economics References Committee inquiry into Social Housing.

Anglicare Australia is a network of independent local, state, national and international organisations linked to the Anglican Church. Our Network provides services across housing and homelessness, financial wellbeing, disability, aged care, children and families, and many other areas. Together, Anglicare Australia Network members support more than half a million people each year, many of whom are living on low and modest incomes.

Across our Network, we see what happens when people cannot find a secure and affordable home. People are pushed into homelessness or severe rental stress. Families live in overcrowded or unsuitable housing. People remain in unsafe situations because they have nowhere else to go. Others seek help from homelessness, financial counselling, family and community services because the cost of keeping a roof over their head has overwhelmed their household budget.

These pressures are not inevitable. They reflect decades of policy choices that have seen governments retreat from the direct provision of housing and rely increasingly on the private market to meet housing need. Anglicare Australia has previously warned that this approach has failed to deliver enough affordable homes for people on the lowest incomes.[i]

Social housing should be a central part of the solution. It provides secure and genuinely affordable homes for people who would otherwise struggle to find them in the private market. Yet Australia's social housing system has not kept pace with population growth or the scale of housing need. The result is a system so constrained that access is increasingly rationed to people experiencing the most acute disadvantage.

This submission argues that Australia must rebuild social housing at scale. Anglicare Australia is calling for social housing to comprise at least ten percent of Australia's housing stock within twenty years, backed by a long-term Commonwealth-funded delivery program. That growth must include both public and community housing, as well as Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander housing, and represent genuine additions to the social housing system.

Governments must also recognise that people struggling with housing costs cannot wait twenty years for relief. A long-term program of social housing investment should be accompanied by fair limits on rent increases to give people greater security while the homes Australia needs are being built.

Anglicare Australia therefore recommends:

- establishing a binding national target for social housing to comprise at least ten percent of Australia's housing stock within twenty years;
- establishing a long-term, Commonwealth-led and funded program to deliver the net additional social housing needed to meet that target;

- expanding both public and community housing, alongside Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander housing, while protecting existing social housing stock;
- independently report progress each year, counting genuine net additions and distinguishing them from replacement, transfers and reclassification; and
- introduce fair limits on rent increases to protect people in the private rental market while Australia rebuilds its social housing system.

Australia's shortage of social housing is the result of sustained under-investment. Reversing it will take sustained investment in return. With clear targets, long-term Commonwealth leadership and accountability for genuine growth, Australia can build a social housing system that meets the scale of need.

Building social housing at scale

Australia has failed to build enough social housing to keep pace with population growth and housing need. While governments have continued to invest in housing through the tax and transfer systems, direct provision of housing for people on low incomes has languished.

The result is a social housing system that is shrinking relative to the population it serves. In 2011, 4.8 percent of Australian households lived in social housing.[ii] By 2025, that figure had fallen to four percent. Over the same period, the number of households in Australia grew from 8.4 million to 10.6 million, while the number living in social housing increased by just 26,000.[iii]

This decline is part of a much longer shift away from public provision. Anglicare Australia's research has shown that direct Commonwealth spending on housing has fallen substantially in per capita terms over the past four decades, while governments have increasingly relied on private market subsidies and income transfers.[iv] As Anglicare Australia has argued in previous submissions, relying on the private rental market to provide affordable housing has failed.

The consequences can be seen in social housing waiting lists across the country. At June 2025, 206,000 households were on consolidated social housing waiting lists across Australia.[v] This figure does not capture the full scale of need. The Australian Institute of Health and Welfare cautions that waiting lists are affected by eligibility rules, allocation policies and priorities, and therefore should not be treated as a measure of underlying demand.[vi]

Research from the UNSW City Futures Research Centre provides a much fuller picture. Its analysis estimates that more than 640,000 low-income households currently have unmet housing needs. These are households experiencing homelessness, living in overcrowded housing, or paying more than 30 percent of their income in rent. Without a major change in policy, that unmet need is projected to grow to more than 940,000 households by 2041.[vii]

This need exists across Australia. It is not confined to the major cities or to communities where housing pressures receive the most attention. The City Futures analysis finds that around 65 percent of current unmet need is in capital cities and around 35 percent is in regional Australia.[viii]

For the Anglicare Australia Network, these figures reflect what services see every day. A shortage of affordable housing means people remaining homeless for longer, competing for private rentals they cannot afford, living in overcrowded or unsuitable homes, or remaining in unsafe situations because there is nowhere else to go. Our Network has also seen housing affordability become an increasingly common reason for people to seek homelessness support, including among people in full-time work.

Australia cannot address a shortage of this scale through incremental additions to the existing system. Nor should the ambition of housing policy be determined by what governments currently believe they can deliver. Governments should determine the level of social housing Australia needs and build the capacity required to deliver it.

Anglicare Australia therefore supports a national target for social housing to comprise at least ten percent of Australia's housing stock within twenty years. A proportional target is important because it ensures that social housing grows alongside the population and the wider housing system. It would also provide a clear benchmark against which governments and the community can measure whether Australia is genuinely rebuilding social housing over time.

A target of this scale would begin to reverse decades of decline and bring the social housing system much closer to the level of demonstrated need. Most importantly, it would shift the goal of housing policy away from managing scarcity and towards ensuring that people who need an affordable home can get one.

Recommendations: A binding social housing target
Anglicare Australia recommends that the Commonwealth establish a binding national target for social housing to comprise at least 10 percent of Australia's housing stock within twenty years.

The Federal Government must lead and fund the delivery of social housing

Rebuilding social housing at the scale Australia needs will require a sustained investment over decades. Short-term funding rounds and one-off programs cannot provide the certainty or scale needed to reverse the decline in social housing.

Based on the current size of Australia's housing system and projected growth, reaching a target of social housing comprising at least ten percent of housing stock within twenty years would require approximately 1.09 million additional social housing dwellings. That equates to around 54,700 net additional homes each year over the next two decades. This figure should be treated as a starting point rather than a fixed construction target. The size of Australia's population and housing stock will continue to change. Governments should therefore regularly update the number of homes required to meet the ten percent target, rather than allowing the target to fall behind population growth.

The Commonwealth must lead this effort. States and Territories will continue to play a critical role in providing land, planning for new housing, investing their own funds and delivering social housing. Community housing providers and Aboriginal community-controlled organisations will also be essential partners, but only the Commonwealth has the fiscal capacity and national reach to underpin a program at the scale required.

There is already a framework for this kind of national leadership. The National Agreement on Social Housing and Homelessness brings the Commonwealth, States and Territories together under a national agreement, with the Australian Government currently providing around $1.8 billion each year to states and territories. What is missing is a long-term funding commitment tied to a clear national target for expanding social housing.

Anglicare Australia has previously argued that governments cannot rely on the private market to provide affordable housing for people on the lowest incomes, and that the Commonwealth must take greater responsibility for direct investment in social and affordable housing. Reaching a ten percent target will require that commitment to be substantially increased and sustained over time.

Funding should be predictable and indexed to the real cost of delivering housing. A twenty-year funding pipeline would give governments, community housing providers and the construction sector greater certainty to acquire land, plan projects, develop their workforces and maintain a steady pipeline of new homes. It would also help avoid the stop-start approach to investment that makes it harder and more expensive to build at scale.

The way this investment is provided also matters. Governments should prioritise capital investment that produces genuinely affordable homes over financing models that leave providers carrying high levels of debt. Social housing exists to provide secure homes to people who cannot afford market rents. Funding arrangements should support that purpose, rather than requiring providers to increase rents or cross-subsidise social housing through less affordable housing products.

The Commonwealth should therefore negotiate a long-term national social housing agreement with States and Territories that sets out the contribution expected from each level of government and provides sufficient Commonwealth funding to meet the national target. Funding should be tied to net additions to social housing stock, ensuring that replacement dwellings, transfers and reclassifications are not presented as growth.

A national program of this kind would do more than fund individual projects. It would give governments and providers the confidence to build the workforce, land pipeline and organisational capacity required to deliver social housing at scale. The level of need should determine the level of ambition, not the capacity of the system after decades of under-investment.

Recommendation: The Commonwealth must take the lead

Anglicare Australia recommends that the Commonwealth establish and fund a long-term national social housing delivery program, with an initial goal of delivering approximately 54,700 net additional social homes each year and the annual requirement regularly updated to ensure social housing reaches at least ten percent of Australia's housing stock within twenty years. The program should set clear responsibilities for all levels of government and provide additional, predictable funding indexed to the cost of delivering new social housing.

Social housing targets must be based on need

Social housing should be built where it is needed and for the people who need it. Governments should use evidence of housing need to determine what homes are built, where they are located and who they are designed for. At present, severe shortages mean that social housing is increasingly rationed to people experiencing the most acute disadvantage. In 2024-25, more than four in five new public housing allocations went to households classified as being in greatest need. Prioritising these households is essential. People experiencing homelessness, family and domestic violence, severe rental stress, overcrowding, disability, or living in housing that puts their health or safety at risk should have priority access to social housing.

A system that can only accommodate people once their circumstances become extreme is not working as it should. Social housing should also prevent people from reaching crisis in the first place. As the supply of social housing grows, eligibility should expand to include more people on low and moderate incomes who cannot find a secure and affordable home in the private market.

Anglicare Australia's Essential Workers Rental Affordability Snapshot shows that the shortage of affordable rentals now extends well beyond people on the lowest incomes. In 2025, we surveyed more than 51,000 rental listings across Australia and found that an aged care worker could afford just 1.7 percent, a registered nurse 1.5 percent, an ambulance worker 2.3 percent, a cleaner 1.1 percent, and a hospitality worker just 0.8 percent.[ix] These are people doing essential jobs in communities across Australia, yet the overwhelming majority of rental homes are beyond what they can reasonably afford.

Social housing offers ongoing affordability, which is something that discounted market housing cannot guarantee. Because rents are generally linked to household income rather than simply discounted from prevailing market rents, social housing can remain affordable even when market rents rise. This is particularly important for people whose incomes are unlikely to increase substantially over time, including people relying on income support, older people and many people with disability.

Expanding both public and community housing

Meeting this need will require governments to expand both public and community housing. Anglicare Australia supports a strong community housing sector, including the role played by Anglicare organisations and other community housing providers. Community housing providers bring development expertise, local partnerships and experience supporting tenants with diverse and complex needs. However, growth in community housing should not come at the expense of public housing or become a substitute for direct government provision.

Over the past two decades, Australia has increasingly shifted the composition of its social housing system towards community housing. Between 2006 and 2025, the number of public housing dwellings fell from around 341,000 to 297,000.[x] Over the same period, community housing grew from around 30,100 to 118,000 dwellings.[xi] Some of this change reflects governments transferring

the management or ownership of existing public housing to community housing providers, rather than the construction of additional social housing.

This is crucial because transferring an existing home from one part of the social housing system to another does not create an additional home for someone who needs one. Governments should be judged by whether they are expanding the total supply of social housing, not simply changing who owns or manages existing stock.

Public housing also plays an important role in its own right. It is a permanent public asset and allows governments to provide housing directly to people who would otherwise be excluded from the housing market. Governments should retain the capacity, expertise and assets needed to fulfil that responsibility. The goal should therefore not be to choose between public and community housing. Australia needs much more of both. New investment should deliver genuine additions to social housing while ensuring that public housing remains a substantial and growing part of the system.

The same principle applies to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander housing. Aboriginal community-controlled organisations must be central to decisions about housing for First Nations communities, with investment supporting culturally appropriate housing and self-determined delivery rather than imposing a single model across communities.

Building according to need also means providing the right homes in the right places. Investment decisions should reflect the size and composition of local waiting lists and broader measures of unmet housing need, including the need for accessible homes, larger homes for families, homes suitable for older people, and housing in communities where people can remain connected to work, services, family and support networks.

Governments should not set social housing targets according to what the existing system can deliver. Decades of under-investment have constrained the capacity of governments, providers and the construction sector. If documented need exceeds existing delivery capacity, the response should be to invest in the land, workforce, organisations and construction capacity needed to close that gap. A major boost to social housing system would allow Australia to do several things at once: guarantee priority for people facing the greatest disadvantage, progressively provide secure housing to more people priced out of the private market, and rebuild the capacity of governments themselves to provide housing.

Recommendation: Setting targets based on need
Anglicare Australia recommends that social housing investment and delivery targets be based on documented housing need, with priority given to people experiencing homelessness, family and domestic violence, severe rental stress, overcrowding, disability and other forms of acute disadvantage. Governments should invest in substantial growth in both public and community housing, as well as Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander housing, and ensure that growth represents genuine additions to the overall social housing stock.

Protect and expand social housing

Building social housing at scale must mean a genuine expansion of Australia's social housing system. Governments should protect the homes that already exist while adding new public, community and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander housing. This is particularly important after a long period in which changes within the social housing system have sometimes been presented as growth. The transfer of public housing to community housing providers may change who manages or owns a dwelling, but it does not create another home. The Productivity Commission notes that the decline in public housing and growth in community housing over the past decade partly reflects transfers of public housing stock to the community housing sector. [xii]

Anglicare Australia supports a strong and growing community housing sector, but we do not believe that transfers between different forms of social housing should be counted as additions to supply. Nor should governments be able to meet new housing targets by reclassifying existing homes. Progress must be measured by whether there are more social homes available to people who need them.

The same principle should apply when ageing social housing is renewed or redeveloped. Much of Australia's existing public housing requires investment to ensure that homes are safe, accessible, energy efficient and suitable for the people who live in them. Governments should fund this work rather than allowing existing social housing to deteriorate or be lost from the system. Where redevelopment involves demolishing existing social housing, governments should deliver a substantial net increase in social housing on the site or across the redevelopment. Simply replacing existing dwellings one-for-one may renew the stock, but it does nothing to address the shortage that has left hundreds of thousands of households without the housing they need.

Redevelopment must also protect existing tenants. People should not lose a secure home in the name of expanding or improving social housing. Tenants affected by redevelopment should be involved from the earliest stages, given meaningful choices about relocation, and guaranteed the right to return where they wish to do so. Redevelopment should minimise disruption to people's connections to family, community, services, education and employment.

This is especially important because social housing is more than a dwelling. For many tenants it provides the stability that allows them to maintain relationships, access support, manage their health, participate in their community and build a life in a place they know. Decisions about redevelopment should recognise those connections rather than treating existing tenants as an obstacle to renewal.

Governments must also protect the long-term public value of new investment. Homes funded as social housing should remain social housing. Public investment should create enduring assets that continue to provide affordable homes over generations, rather than housing that can later be sold, converted to other tenures or lost from the social housing system.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander housing requires particular attention. Investment should expand housing controlled by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities, with Aboriginal community-controlled housing organisations supported to own, manage and develop housing. This is distinct from simply allocating more mainstream social housing to First Nations households: it supports community control, culturally appropriate housing and long-term capacity within Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations. The Productivity Commission separately recognises Indigenous community housing as a form of social housing owned or managed by Indigenous organisations and community councils.[xiii]

Protecting existing stock and expanding supply must therefore go hand in hand. Governments should be accountable for the net increase in social housing they deliver, not simply the number of projects announced, dwellings redeveloped or properties transferred between providers.

Recommendation: Protecting and building upon existing social housing
Anglicare Australia recommends that governments protect and expand existing public, community and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander housing. Housing targets should count only genuine net additions to social housing stock. Redevelopment should deliver a net increase in social housing, protect existing tenants from unnecessary displacement, provide a right of return, and involve tenants in decisions that affect their homes and communities.

Measure progress and protect renters while we build

A twenty-year social housing program needs clear and transparent measures of progress. Governments should be accountable not simply for the money they announce or the projects they commence, but for whether Australia is actually increasing the number and proportion of homes available as social housing. This distinction is vital because headline figures can obscure what is happening within the system. At June 2025, Australia had around 452,000 social housing dwellings, virtually unchanged from the previous year.[xiv] Social housing accounted for just four percent of Australian households, down from 4.7 percent in 2013.

A binding national target should therefore be accompanied by a clear national baseline and independent annual reporting. Progress should be measured against both the net number of additional social homes and social housing's share of Australia's total housing stock. This will ensure that governments cannot meet nominal dwelling targets while social housing continues to fall behind population growth.

Reporting should show what governments are actually delivering. New construction, acquisitions, replacement dwellings, redevelopments, transfers between public and community housing, and reclassifications of existing properties should be reported separately. Transfers and reclassifications may have a role in the management of the system, but they should not be counted as new supply.

Governments should also report on where and what they are building. Annual reporting should show the location and type of new social housing, whether homes meet accessibility and energy efficiency standards, and how growth is distributed across public housing, community housing and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander housing. This would allow governments and the community to assess not only whether the overall target is being met, but whether investment is responding to the needs identified in different communities.

Renters cannot wait twenty years

Accountability for a long-term building program is essential, but even if governments begin building at the scale needed immediately, it will take years to overcome the social housing shortfall. People struggling in the private rental market need relief while that housing is being built.

Anglicare Australia's Rental Affordability Snapshot shows just how little room people on low incomes have left in the private rental market. In 2026, we surveyed almost 49,000 rental listings across Australia. Just one was affordable for a person receiving JobSeeker, and none were affordable for a person receiving Youth Allowance.[xv] Just 0.2 percent were affordable for a single person receiving the Age Pension, while a person earning the full-time minimum wage could afford only 0.5 percent.[xvi] These results show that for people on the lowest incomes, the private rental market is no longer simply difficult to navigate. In much of Australia, there are effectively no affordable options at all.

This is why governments cannot rely on new housing supply alone to provide relief to renters. Building social housing at scale is essential, but it will take time. In the meantime, renters will

continue to face rent increases that can push already unaffordable homes further out of reach. Anglicare Australia supports fair limits on rent increases to give renters greater stability and protection from sudden increases they cannot afford. The Commonwealth should work with states and territories to develop a nationally consistent approach that limits the size and frequency of rent increases, while allowing governments to design the detailed operation of those protections within their tenancy systems.

Rent limits are not a substitute for building social housing. They address a different and more immediate problem. Social housing investment expands the supply of permanently affordable homes over the long term; fair limits on rent increases protect people who must continue renting privately while those homes are being built.

Australia therefore needs to pursue both approaches at once: a sustained national program to rebuild social housing, and stronger protections for the millions of people who will continue to rely on the private rental market in the meantime.

Recommendation: Monitoring progress
Anglicare Australia recommends that progress towards the national social housing target be independently reported each year, including the net number of additional social homes, social housing as a share of total housing stock, and the location, type and tenure of new housing. Reporting should distinguish new construction and acquisitions from renewal, replacement, transfers and reclassification of existing stock.

Recommendation: Protecting renters while social housing is rebuilt
Anglicare Australia also recommends that the Commonwealth work with states and territories to introduce fair limits on rent increases, protecting renters from excessive increases while Australia rebuilds its social housing system.

Conclusion

Australia's shortage of social housing is not inevitable. It is the result of decades in which investment in social housing has failed to keep pace with population growth and housing need. Reversing that decline will require governments to commit to rebuilding the system over the long term.

Anglicare Australia is calling for a binding national target for social housing to comprise at least ten percent of Australia's housing stock within twenty years. Meeting that target will require sustained Commonwealth leadership and funding, with an initial goal of delivering around 54,700 net additional social homes each year and adjusting that figure over time as the population and housing stock grow.

This investment must deliver genuine growth. Australia needs more public housing, more community housing, and more Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander housing. Existing social housing must be protected, and governments should be accountable for net additions rather than transfers, reclassifications or announcements that do not increase the number of homes available.

But rebuilding social housing will take time. People facing unaffordable rents and housing insecurity today cannot wait for a twenty-year building program to be completed. Governments must also introduce fair limits on rent increases to give renters greater security while new social housing is being built.

Social housing is essential public infrastructure. Investing in it means more than increasing dwelling numbers. It means giving people a secure foundation from which to work, raise families, manage their health, participate in their communities and plan for the future. It also means reducing the pressure that housing insecurity and homelessness place on community services and other public systems.

Australia has the capacity to rebuild social housing at the scale required. What is needed now is a long-term commitment to do so.

Anglicare Australia thanks the Committee for the opportunity to further contribute to this inquiry. We would welcome the opportunity to provide further evidence or appear at a public hearing.

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[i] Anglicare Australia (2023) Anglicare Australia submission on the consultation for the Housing Legislative Package.

[ii] Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (2026) Housing assistance in Australia.

[iii] Ibid.

[iv] Anglicare Australia (2026) Rebalancing the Capital Gains Tax: Housing, Inequality and the Case for Reform.

[v] Op cit: Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (2026).

[vi] Ibid.

[vii] UNSW City Futures Research Centre and Community Housing Industry Association (2022) Quantifying Australia's Unmet Housing Need: A National Snapshot.

[viii] Ibid.
[ix] Anglicare Australia (2025) Rental Affordability Snapshot: Essential Workers Report.
[x] Op cit: Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (2026).
[xi] Ibid.
[xii] Productivity Commission (2026) Report on Government Services 2026: Part G, Section 18 Housing.
[xiii] Ibid.
[xiv] Op cit: Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (2026).
[xv] Anglicare Australia (2026) Rental Affordability Snapshot.
[xvi] Ibid.