

SUMMARY OF CONSULTATION

Migrant and refugee community

Date of consultation:	2 September 2017
Group consulted with:	Migrant and refugee community
Number of attendees:	98
Name of organisations:	MARSS, CAA English class, Australian Mon Association, KAREN community, Canberra Muslim Community, Indian Community, African Australians, Pacific Island community, ACT Chinese Women, Settlement Council, AGFA, Iraqi Christians in Canberra, IWIN Canberra, Zimbabwe, Serra Leone, Martins Property Group, Forum Australia, Department of Finance, Department of Veterans Affairs, Unity Incorporated, ACT Chinese Ethnic Friendship Association, Booyah Group, CMC, United Nesian Movement

Key themes arising from the consultation

- A lack of developed English language skills can be a problem to finding affordable housing or solutions to homelessness.
- Current system is too complex (i.e. regulations): sometimes you get conflicting information from regulatory bodies. Too much 'public policy speak', need more plain English and not bureaucratic jargon.
- One of the key factors is employment and the availability of employment opportunities. Migrants and refugees may not be aware of their rights as workers which leads to unstable income and an associated loss of housing stability.
- There's a lot of confusion in the community as to the nature of housing affordability and how the problem is communicated by the government to the wider community. Everybody needs to work together to address this issue – there has to be a united front consisting of community leaders and the government on housing affordability.
- Need to ensure that we don't develop more enclaves where problems are created. A big problem is the lack of social inclusion and as a result, social isolation

Key quotes

- "People are willing to help but there are not enough services that allow people to help. We need more screening services for both the homeless and for those willing and capable to

help. This service can complement government services and can be incorporated within community groups and religious communities.”

- "Whatever policy [decision] is taken, in exchange for the existing one, it must be all-inclusive, particularly by considering the needs of people with disability, women, girls and elderly people."
- "Housing policy needs to be non-discriminating and unbiased to the needs of all."
- "We must examine the alarming rate of homelessness among women and elderly women."
- "Australian cultural norms are the problem - people are judged by their material goods - if you can't afford a house, you're not a man. Owning your own house is a symbol of prestige."
- "The deposit is hard to save up. Maybe could use Super – part of it not all but maybe enough to meet the 20% deposit. Why worry about future pension and not address the problem now and help people to buy their own houses. It's setting up their future for them when they retire."
- "The biggest block is land prices – it's just too expensive – flat out."
- "Anywhere you go the prices are going crazy – we need concessions."
- "Real estate agents' fees need to be minimised for eligible low income households and subsidised by government. \$438k is still too high for a first home buyer – I don't understand that expectation."

What is working well?

- Face to face consultation is much more effective than online consultation.
- Food vans make the lives of the homeless more comfortable in the immediate short term. They are effective because the resources are coming to the people rather than them having to go to find the services.
- Many religious communities are more than willing to offer services to the homeless such as daily food provision.
- Over the last 7 to 8 years in the multicultural community many people have utilised the Land Rent Scheme – it has worked.

What could be improved?

- Government needs to be more critical of the services that it funds and make sure that these services are actually achieving outcomes. Governments need to be better at coordinating services.
- Distribution of information to the homeless needs to be improved and this is the first step towards making services more effective.
- Resources that are currently available need to be made more accessible for people from culturally diverse backgrounds whose English language skills may not be very good.
- More not-for-profit organisations required to manage housing requirements and social housing in general.
- More flexible assessment for social housing applications.
- Public transport infrastructure needs to be present in areas where social housing is being built.
- Living near universities is expensive and students are forced into share housing.
- There are too many restrictions on providing affordable housing such as the 50% increase in land tax and GST.

New ideas

- Use empty buildings for crisis shelter. In the immediate term these buildings could be used to house the homeless as a short-term solution. Partnerships could be established with building companies to house homeless while waiting for development approval.
- An initiative or tax incentives for people in underutilised properties to encourage potential share housing (a system like Airbnb, an online portal).
- Work with private corporations to provide a percentage of apartment blocks at affordable levels to suitable candidates that have been through a vetting process to ensure eligibility.

- Set up an initiative with private construction companies to hire homeless or less fortunate individuals (perhaps 10% of total workforce). They can be trained and construction firms can market their philanthropic mindset.
- Develop the Land Rent Scheme further by working with investors who get the property at a cheaper rate on the condition that they build affordable rental housing. After 10 years the developers can purchase the land.
- Helping people get into private rental by helping pay for other goods such as groceries or utilities.
- Bring interstate private investors to build complexes at a lower price.
- Undertake ongoing assessment of settled migrants in public housing to assess relevant needs and provide the most suitable accommodation for their changing circumstances.
- Planning reform to allow smaller units for one person – e.g. tiny homes on larger blocks.