

# SUMMARY OF CONSULTATION

## ACT Shelter Forum

**Date of consultation:** 13 September 2017

**Group consulted with:** ACT Shelter

**Number of attendees:** 4

### Key themes arising from the consultation

- Improve rights for tenants renting privately – such as the right to paint, have pets or put up pictures.
- Real out of pocket expenses need to be considered when determining affordability – this includes the costs of utilities and the costs of moving every year (can be \$2,000-\$3,000 each time).
- The rental bond gap needs to be fixed (where a bond is required when moving into a property and the tenant already has a bond lodged in the rental bonds office). Tenants are unaware of what options are available to them and are accessing pay day lenders to put up the bond. The rental bonds board should promote more the ability to transfer bonds.
- Instead of incentivising private landlords to rent at affordable levels the government should enforce penalties on those landlords who are not playing by the current rules to make sure they abide by them.
- There was general support for local CHPs being supported and concerns were raised about big out of state providers not being as responsive to tenant needs and complaints as local providers (Grenfell Tower in the UK was raised as an example).
- There is a need for consistent policies and that the solutions are not just in the hands of government but the whole community and that it needs to be socially inclusive.
- Remove provisions in the Territory Plan which allow prices to be skewed such as land banking. It must be mandated that housing products are developed, built and occupied within a certain period of time.
- Affordable housing should be targeted to occupation, e.g. like a New York City scheme which targets affordable housing to hospitality workers.
- Adaptable housing needs to be developed – this will allow people to have a smaller house initially and then to build additional rooms as their family circumstances change and they need more room.

- The government needs to be encouraging young people to buy modest homes and work their way up the property ladder rather than buying the house that their parents have as a first home.

## Key quotes

- “Incentivise smaller houses rather than forcing the builders to build the biggest properties they possibly can to gain the biggest profit.”
- “Allow smaller houses to be built.”
- “Give people choice and they will choose.”
- “If the Chief Minister was as committed to improving the housing situation as he is to the light rail project there would be a taskforce which would be able to come up with the solutions in a matter of hours.”
- “Landlords are out there who are making money from letting granny flats and garages in their backyards and are not playing by the rules.”
- “People on the streets don’t want to feel like they are getting a handout.”
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## What is working well?

- General support in the role that Community Housing Providers (CHPs) play in helping to increase 'affordability' for low income households.
- The recently announced Commonwealth Bond Aggregator model was discussed (reducing the loan rate to 2% rather than the commercial rate and allowing community housing providers to pay the debt back over a longer period of time). This was supported by attendees.

## What could be improved?

- There needs to be a limit on the number of increases there can be in rent and landlords should be required to maintain properties in a reasonable state of repair.
- There is a lack of recognition in the Discussion Paper about the issues with the Residential Tenancies Act which have been known about for a long time.
- The issue of pets in private rental was discussed and it was noted that property managers are often the ones putting blocks in place for people with pets. If the tenant is able to talk to the landlord directly they are often happy to have pets in the property.
- The major stress of moving all the time needs to be considered when examining the impacts on health and education spending. If people have secure places to live then these other costs will likely go down.
- Participants also discussed the need to keep properties affordable on resale for a certain period of time.
- The group was supportive of a rent to buy and shared equity scheme, but thought that the shared equity scheme should be more inclusive than just being eligible for public housing tenants.
- The group discussed the barriers which exist across Australia and suggested that these needed to be addressed at a federal level before doing anything in the ACT. It was also noted that CHPs face a wider issue with banks because banks require a certain size and scale of community housing provider before they are willing to lend credit at commercial rates.

## New ideas

- The government could top up what tenants can pay and guarantee this amount to the landlord directly rather than paying it to the tenant.
- Group participants also noted the need to have an independent review system of CHPs service provision particularly how they are managing properties.
- Group participants agreed that tiny house developments/caravan parks could be an answer to affordable living in Canberra but that people should be involved in the development of

the community within these developments. If people are involved in the community through building them or doing gardening etc., then people will take more pride in them and a sense of community will be built.

- Promote more self-building. Regulation currently prohibits building your own house but in the past up to 60% of houses were self-built. Pre fab kit houses are good for this. They are modest and can be self-built.

## Other ideas

- There should be some method of applying a lease variation charge exemption for affordable housing developments or affordable units within a development.
- Amend the Territory Plan rules to limit site coverage.