

Submission

To	Senate Standing Committees on Economics
Topic	National Housing and Homelessness Plan Bill 2024 (No. 2) Inquiry
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Acknowledgement of Country

Uniting Communities respects the enduring spiritual relationship First Nations people have with land and sea and the importance of this relationship to the wellbeing of First Nations people, including their languages and customs.

By seeking reconciliation and working in partnership with Aboriginal communities, Uniting Communities will move towards healing, justice, self-determination, and empowerment for Aboriginal people.

About Uniting Communities

We are an inclusive not-for-profit organisation working alongside more than 80,000 South Australians each year and have been creating positive change for South Australian communities for more than 120 years. We utilise this expertise to advocate for systemic change across diverse social justice issues to shape public and social policy that delivers better outcomes for marginalised communities.

We support those in need to find the courage to move forward through enriching their lives and uniting the communities in which they live. By tackling the deep-seated challenges that affect people's lives, we work to create systemic change and brighter futures for all South Australians.

Uniting Communities provides several services for people who are experiencing, or at risk of experiencing, homelessness. The [Homeless Connect SA Service](#) is a 24/7 state-wide free call service that operates as a gateway to the specialist homelessness services in South Australia. Homeless Connect aims to link people to relevant services and to provide short-term assistance until a referral to a specialist homelessness service can be made. We have experienced a 17% increase in the number of calls to our service in the last 12 months.

The [Ruby's Reunification Program](#) helps to keep families together and prevents young people from entering the homelessness sector. The program does this by supporting young people and their parents or caregivers to resolve conflict and improve relationships. We also welcome young people who are currently not at home, but would like to find a way to return by providing:

- A safe place for the young person to stay, spending some nights at Ruby's and some at home where appropriate
- Family counselling
- 24-hour therapeutic support
- Access to tailored services for families.

“Things are much better at home now – I’m much happier there. Ruby’s really helped us get back on track.” Ruby’s client.

We operate [Reconnecting Families – Reconnect \(Salisbury\)](#) which supports young people who are experiencing homelessness or at risk of experiencing homelessness in the Salisbury area. Our focus is

on intervening early to reunify families through counselling, as well as connecting young people with education, training, work and their wider community.

Our [Kurlana Tampawardli](#) service provides short-term crisis accommodation for those visiting Adelaide from a rural area and are at risk of sleeping rough. We also support tenants of the South Australian Housing Authority (SAHA) who are experiencing overcrowding in their home. Part of the Kurlana Tampawardli service is helping people to return to country using 'safe tracking'. This service supports people who have been sleeping rough or living in crowded housing in Adelaide and wish to return home. Kurlana Tampawardli is Kaurna for 'new house on the plains'.

We have provided comments on the draft Bill that relate to our experience and expertise as a specialist homelessness not-for-profit service provider.

Submission to the Federal Parliament's Senate Standing Committees on Economics Inquiry into the National Housing and Homelessness Plan Bill 2024 (No. 2)

Uniting Communities thanks the Senate Standing Committees on Economics for undertaking an inquiry into the National Housing and Homelessness Plan Bill 2024 (No. 2) ("the Bill").

Australia remains in the midst of a housing crisis, and we acknowledge that low-income earners are disproportionately impacted by significant housing challenges. The Bill provides us with an opportunity to focus on improving access to housing and decreasing the rates of homelessness across Australia. We agree that national consistency in the provision of housing policy and homelessness services is vital for delivering a future where all Australians have access to safe, accessible and affordable housing.

Our submission in October 2023 to the Department of Social Services' consultation to develop a National Housing and Homelessness Plan (NHHP) acknowledged the importance of developing a long-term strategy to address the housing and homelessness challenges faced in Australia.

Whilst supportive of the proposed Bill, we acknowledge that ultimately, each state and territory government assumes primary responsibility for addressing homelessness. The Federal Government, however, can play a pivotal facilitating role through its financial contributions and national leadership. It also possesses other important 'tax and transfer' levers through tax incentivisation and the Commonwealth Rent Assistance (CRA).

Key recommendations:

- 1. The National Housing and Homelessness Plan Bill 2024 (No. 2) is supported and passed into law.**
- 2. Appropriate resources are allocated to ensure the objectives of the Bill are achieved, including the establishment of a National Consumer Council and a National Housing and Homelessness Advocate.**
- 3. State and Territory Government Ministers responsible for addressing housing and homelessness are strongly encouraged to contribute to the development and ongoing monitoring of the NHHP.**

Additional comments

Lead Agency Recommendation

Although we are supportive of the Bill's recommendation that Housing Australia is nominated to lead the development of a ten-year National Housing and Homelessness Plan, we strongly endorse that the plan is prepared through a collaborative process and the expertise of the Specialist Homelessness Sector is actively considered and included.

Consequences of not having a plan

On 31 July 2024, the Government of South Australia's Audit Office of South Australia (AOSA) published a performance audit report titled "[Managing Homelessness Services](#)".

This audit assessed how effectively the South Australian Housing Trust (SAHT) managed the provision of specialist homelessness services (SHS). The report acknowledged that demand for SHS has "increased considerably due to the significant pressures on the housing market that make finding affordable housing difficult."

The audit identified several key facts including:

- 71% of specialist homelessness services clients did not have their need for long-term housing met in 2022-23.
- SAHT spent \$73 million on supporting 19,422 South Australians experiencing homelessness issues in 2022-23.
- The average number of monthly specialist homelessness services clients increased by 9% between 2019-20 and 2022-23, while SA Government funding for these services decreased in real terms

The Audit Office of South Australia concluded that although the SAHT was progressing some important initiatives to improve its practices and processes, it was "**not effectively managing its provision of specialist homelessness services and the increased demand for them**".

Several gaps were highlighted including:

- **Strategic planning** for specialist homelessness services does not reflect the current operating environment or targets for measuring success.
- **No analysis** was performed to identify service gaps and determine funding required to support people experiencing or at risk of homelessness.
- **There is a lack of guidance** on how services are to be prioritised in periods of high demand.
- **There is limited oversight** of the way service providers plan to achieve intended outcomes.
- **Service contract design** does not enable effective performance monitoring.
- **There is limited oversight and reporting** on system and service outcomes and performance.

The AOSA report stated that these "gaps increase the risk that South Australians experiencing or at risk of homelessness will not receive the support they need to obtain or maintain sustainable housing, and they may experience housing insecurity for longer."

In light of these findings it is acknowledged that the Federal Government can play a valuable role through its Partnership Agreements with State and Territory Governments and expectations and targets articulated in a National Plan.

Conclusion

It is hoped that legislating the National Housing and Homelessness Plan Bill 2024 (No. 2) will assist State and Territory Governments to improve their responses to addressing the housing crisis and homelessness by highlighting best-practice and evidence-based solutions.