



## HOUSING FOR ALL

1. Congress asserts that housing is a human right. The right to adequate housing is enshrined in the United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights (Article 25) and the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (Article 11), and entails more than simply a right to shelter: it is a right to have *adequate* housing, which may depend on a range of factors including affordability, accessibility, security, habitability, location, and availability of services,
2. Congress recognises the right to decent affordable housing, and the need to make it easier to buy a home, make it easier to rent; and ensure people experiencing homelessness can access the housing and support they need. Congress supports the development of a policy that provides a sufficient supply of good quality housing to meet the needs of every Australian whether they rent or own property.
3. Congress notes that there is a growing housing crisis in Australia, with a lack of good quality, affordable housing; lack of security for renters; lack of public and community housing; and the lack of Indigenous Housing. Housing prices in Australia's capital cities are rising at the fastest pace in 32 years, with prices in Sydney, Melbourne, Hobart, Canberra and Brisbane at record highs. There is a national shortage of hundreds of thousands of affordable properties for low income renters.
4. Congress recognises that wage stagnation, unemployment and underemployment, and insecure work are leading causes of housing stress – where the proportion of wages working people spend on mortgage and rent payments are on the rise, while wage growth is stagnant. People are spending a larger proportion of their pay on housing, with 20% of mortgage holders at risk of 'mortgage stress' as of 2020. The COVID-19 crisis has put further economic stress on working people and their families, with many facing rent increases and homelessness as rent increase and eviction moratoriums end, and job losses and financial stress as COVID-19 income supports JobSeeker and JobKeeper come to an end.
5. Australia is dealing with the fallout from the rise in the 1990s of contract, part-time and casual work, regressive taxation arrangements and the poor management of supply and demand for housing. The result is a rise in investment in properties, home ownership later in life (including paying off a mortgage in retirement), renting being a lifelong reality for many, and increased demand for public and community housing.
6. The housing crisis is pushing low- and middle-income workers further to the fringes of our cities. Congress believes that all workers should be able to afford to live near their workplaces if they choose, and resolves to fight for the right of all workers to have access to affordable, quality housing located near their family and friends, employment, and integrated with transport and services.
7. Congress calls upon State Government to adopt and fund formal plans for cities that include releasing new land, supporting increased affordable density in inner-urban rings, delivering public transport infrastructure to outer suburban areas of our major cities, decentralising work from CBD to regional and suburban cities and genuinely providing the growth of 'poly-centric' cities. As Australia seeks to recover and rebuild from the COVID-19 pandemic, Congress notes that large investment in building new public and community housing would serve two important needs: the urgent social need to provide everyone with a roof over their head, and the need to drive economic recovery through local job creation. Instead of taking this road, however, the

Morrison Government's "HomeBuilder" scheme, which sees eligible Australians receive a \$25,000 grant to build a new home or carry out renovations, is poorly designed and targets those who already have the money available to build or renovate.

8. Housing policy lacks coordination at the national level. Congress calls on the Australian Government to establish a permanent National Affordable Housing Agency to establish a long term national housing plan, aimed at ensuring the provision of adequate housing for all.
9. Congress notes Australia's retirement incomes system has been built on the assumption that most retirees would own their home outright. But modelling shows that the share of over 65s who own their home will fall to 57% by 2056, down from 76% in 2019, with less than 50% of low-income retirees likely to own their own homes in the future, down from 70% in 2019.
10. Congress notes with alarm the proposal by a group of Liberal Party backbenchers to force workers to use their superannuation to fund housing deposits would be a disaster for working people – particularly young workers. A report by Industry Super Australia published in February 2021 has found that forcing first home buyers to raid their super savings could see median prices in the five biggest Australian cities increase by 8 and 16 percent. If a 30-year-old withdrew \$20,000 in super today for a house, they can expect to retire with roughly \$80,000 less in today's dollars.
11. This proposed policy comes at a time when the average Australian is likely to run out of superannuation savings 10 years before they die. During the COVID-19 pandemic, the Government forced workers to fund their own crisis response which led to more than 700,000 people emptying their retirement savings. Congress affirms that workers should not have to choose between a home or retirement.

## Affordable housing

12. Owning one's own home remains the goal for many working Australians, yet it is increasingly out of reach and this has been exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic. In the 1970s and 1980s, the OECD's house price-to-income ratio averaged around 76 for Australia, rising to an average of 85 during the 1990s. The ratio surpassed 100 for the first time in 2002 and, over the past five years, has averaged nearly 140. March 2021 data shows that homes in all capital cities had grown in value by over 5% with some as high as 14% and regional homes in 5 of 7 jurisdictions had grown in value by over 10%.
13. Young people are particularly disadvantaged and locked out of the housing market, with the housing boom contributing to the growing wealth gap between older and younger generations. Only 20% of Australians aged between 25-34 own their own home today, compared to 60% in 1981. A recent poll conducted by ANU revealed that 87% of Australians believe that future generations will not be able to afford to buy a home, and 68% of house-less younger Australians worry they will never be able to afford a home if present conditions persist.
14. Congress agrees that while the causes of the present housing crisis are many, 'negative gearing', the concessional taxation of capital gains and how land is presently taxed all contribute to the crisis and render effective solutions more difficult to achieve. Congress notes that the benefits of negative gearing and the capital gains tax discount overwhelmingly flow to Australia's highest income earners. The richest ten per cent of households gain 34 per cent of the benefits of negative gearing arrangements and 73 per cent of the benefits of the capital gains tax discount.
15. Congress notes that high energy costs are also an issue for housing affordability, with a recent report by the Australian Energy Regulator noting that low-income households spend twice as much of their disposable income on energy as the average household. Consumers are paying a high price for the privatisation, corporatisation and marketisation of the electricity grid. Individual consumers are now tasked with figuring out how to reduce their electricity bills, and Congress notes that energy network pressures introduced by 'prosumer' models are not paid for by those individual consumers, but rather the costs are borne by all

consumers collectively while the individual reaps all benefits exclusively. Individuals will not be able to offset the profiteering by private providers. The high levels of social and economic exclusion of marginalised and socially disadvantaged people facilitated by these initiatives is problematic, with those least able to afford it expected to subsidise the costs.

16. To address housing affordability, Congress calls on the Australian Government to:
- a) Address the crises of insecure work, low wage growth, and unemployment and under-employment.
  - b) Immediately and permanently increase JobSeeker payments
  - c) Ensure supply meets actual demand for homes – be they social, community, owner occupied or investment.
  - d) Ensure Government policy settings in economic stimulus (social, community and investments), taxation and capital spending (at state and commonwealth levels), and social services (including homelessness, aged care, child welfare, and family and domestic violence) that deliver affordable and liveable homes, whether owned or rented.
  - e) Invest and encourage investment in affordable home ownership schemes
  - f) Implement 'Inclusionary Zoning' to developers include some proportion of dedicated affordable housing in new housing developments. Developers should be required to provide other amenities in their plans such as public parks, sporting and community facilities.
  - g) Abolish negative gearing for residential investment properties: tax deductions associated with an investment property should only be deductible from income received from that property. Immediately end negative gearing for all new property purchases, and grandfather existing negative gearing arrangements for five years.
  - h) Abolish the capital gains tax (CGT) discount and tax capital gains in the same way as all other sources of income. There is no justification for why income from capital gain should be taxed differently to other forms of income - in taxing capital gains differently we are preferencing those who earn income from capital over those who earn it from other sources.
  - i) Put a cap on the number of investment properties an investor can own. Replace stamp duties with a broad-based annual land tax that will dampen house price inflation, stimulate more building of housing for rental purposes and incentivise the development of idle land.

## Ending homelessness

17. 17. Congress notes that poverty is an underlying cause of homelessness. Congress also notes that women, those under 35 and low on low incomes are at greatest risk of homelessness.
18. 18. On census night in 2016, more than 116,000 people were estimated to be homeless in Australia. In 2019-2020, 6 in 10 of those who were homeless were women. Over 1 in 3 were living a single-parent with 1 or more children. 1 in 6 were children under the age of 10; 1 in 10 were children and youth aged 10-17; and the largest age group of adult clients were aged 25-34.
19. 17. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are disproportionately impacted by homelessness, with one in five of the 116,000 people homeless in Australia identifying as being of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander descent.
20. 18. Congress notes that Governments managed to work collaboratively to house 40,000 homeless people briefly in 2020 during the COVID-19 pandemic – which proves that ending homelessness can be done, if there is the political will. Congress calls for State and Commonwealth Governments to work together to end Australia's housing and homelessness crisis.

21. 19. Congress asserts that well-funded, quality public and community housing is vital to ensuring housing for all. Yet there is not an adequate supply of public and community housing, now or into the future: the Australian Housing and Urban Research Institute (AHURI) predicts that over the next 20 years, an additional 727 300 public and community housing dwellings will be required.
22. 20. The public housing waiting lists in each State are long: before the COVID-19 pandemic, there were almost 150,000 people on the waiting list, many waiting years to be housed. Australia's public and community housing stock of 4.3% of all households is well below the OECD average of 6%. As a percentage of GDP, Australia spends only 0.23% on social housing compared to the OECD average of 0.26%.
23. 21. Australia's public housing system is grossly underfunded: public housing stock has been eaten away through privatisation, and remaining stock is run down. Increased funding is desperately needed to increase the public housing stock and ensure public housing can be regularly maintained.
24. 22. Congress supports the call from housing advocacy groups for the Australian Government to adopt the Social Housing Acceleration and Renovation Program (SHARP), which will help end homelessness, and also boost Australia's economic recovery. The SHARP shows how a \$7.2 billion investment from government could deliver:
  - a) \$9 billion in direct investment in community housing
  - b) Up to 30,000 units of housing;
  - c) On average 18,000 FTE jobs per year over four years; and
  - d) An increase in the economic output of up to \$18.2 billion per year over four years.
25. 23. Equity Economics estimates that an additional 30,000 housing units would reduce the number of Australians experiencing homelessness by around 4,500 per year and save \$135 million in direct support costs.
26. 24. Congress calls for State and Commonwealth Governments to urgently increase public and community housing through:
  - a) direct government investment in additional public housing stock, and increasing funding to ensure public housing is properly maintained and fit-for-purpose. There is a critical need for increased funding from the Commonwealth to the state governments to provide and maintain public housing.
  - b) Support the continuation of publicly owned regional and remote housing for the public sector, to support the delivery of services in regional and remote communities. Increased funding for maintenance of these properties is critical.
  - c) Employing adequate numbers of staff to manage, maintain and grow public and community housing.
  - d) Building the capacity of the community housing sector and adopt the Social Housing Acceleration and Renovation Program (SHARP)
27. 25. Congress notes the important role that public and community services supporting people experiencing or at risk of homelessness play in avoiding and reducing homelessness. Congress calls for the State and Commonwealth Governments to ensure that these services are funded to provide comprehensive support to people who are experiencing or who are at risk of homelessness.

## Fair renting

28. The rights of those who rent in Australia have not kept pace with the structural shift towards renting that has occurred in recent decades. Renting should not be viewed as a waiting room for home ownership. Whether someone rents out of choice or necessity, they are entitled to dignity and security in that housing arrangement.
29. Congress recognises the Australians are renting for longer and often permanently as home ownership grows out of reach for generations of working and middle-class Australians, and the national supply of affordable rental homes remains inadequate. According to the Rental Affordability Index in Dec 2020, there was no capital city in Australia where renting was considered affordable. For the regions, the only place considered affordable was considered unaffordable only 5 years ago (WA).
30. As of August 2020, there are 2.6 million households, and 8 million people, or 30% of the population, renting in one form or another in Australia, and 26% (2.1 million households) are renting from private landlords. The number of low-income private renters (those in the lowest 40% of incomes) has doubled in number over the past two decades to 2.65 million people and as a cohort most spend more than 30% of their incomes on rent, what is considered to be living in 'rental stress'.
31. Congress acknowledges the need to support renters with sustainable long-term renting options including the need to normalise longer term rental agreements. Congress calls on the Australian Government to:
  - a) Permanently increase the levels of Commonwealth Rent Assistance (CRA) to eligible, lower income individuals, women (particularly women aged 55 and above) and families.
  - b) Invest in and encourage investment in build-to-rent and build-to-rent-to-own initiatives
  - c) Establish a national charter of renter's rights setting out clear national minimum standards around security of tenure, stability and fairness of rent prices, and bonds. The charter should seek through uniform tenancy laws a two-year national minimum tenure for renters to apply across state and territory jurisdictions. Housing law must stress that security of tenure is paramount. The charter should include rights and responsibilities that apply during events such as COVID-19, in consultation with government, tenants and tenants' associations, landlords, real estate agents.