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Unions push for national two-year rental standard and 1 in 10 builds to be public housing

Millions of renters would see Australia's standard rental lease doubled to two years and public housing lifted to 1 in 10 new homes built, under proposals unions will put to the Federal Government today.

Having won limits on tax breaks for professional landlords, unions are now pushing governments to strengthen renters' rights through a modern tenure standard and the scale-up of public housing construction to its highest rate since the 1980s.

Unions want a new national tenancy standard of two years to give renters greater stability, make it easier to plan ahead and reduce the financial pressures of moving homes repeatedly. The plan also includes stronger protections against unfair evictions and rent gouging.

Landlords would be required to offer at least two years of housing security as the default standard, with renters still free to choose shorter leases.

National Cabinet would deliver the changes by updating its 2023 'A Better Deal for Renters' agreement, which harmonised renters' rights across Commonwealth, State and Territory Governments.

Unions will also push for 1 in 10 new homes built to be public housing, alongside a goal of lifting public housing to at least 6 per cent of Australia's total housing stock.

The 1 in 10 target for new builds matches the level of public housing construction under the Hawke Government. It would represent a fivefold increase from the current rate, where just 1 in 50 new homes are public housing.

These changes follow union calls for increasing access to home ownership and support of the Capital Gains Tax and Negative Gearing changes announced in the Federal Budget.

Quotes attributable to ACTU President, Michele O'Neil:

"For too many working people, housing has become a source of stress rather than security, with many workers not able to find secure, affordable housing near where they work. We want to see strong rights for renters and a substantial increase in public housing.

"Nurses, teachers and other workers are living with the yearly uncertainty that comes with constant rent hikes and one-year leases being the standard option.

"Our housing system should reflect the reality that millions of working people are renters. Workers deserve not only secure jobs, but also secure housing. Unions want to see renters with stronger rights, better protections against evictions and more secure leases.

"Moving homes costs money, disrupts lives, and too often pushes workers further away from their jobs. Doubling the default rental standard from one to two years would still allow renters to choose shorter leases, but it would give workers more certainty and stability to plan their lives.

"Australia once built public housing at a scale that matched working people's needs. Under the Hawke Government, 1 in 10 new homes built were public housing, but today that's closer to 1 in 50. If we're serious about fixing the housing crisis, we must increase public housing stock to free up homes in the private rental market and make renting more affordable for everyone.

“Using modern construction methods such as factory-built modular housing can deliver high-quality homes faster at lower cost and greater scale.

“Governments must all step up and tackle Australia’s housing crisis with the ambition it needs. We need more homes, stronger rights for renters, faster construction and renewed investment in public housing.”

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