

30 October 2017

Legal and Social Issues Committee
Parliament House, Spring Street
EAST MELBOURNE VIC 3002

Dear Committee

Jesuit Social Services welcomes the opportunity to put forward our views on the Public Housing Renewal Program to the Victorian Legislative Council's Standing Committee on Legal and Social Issues.

Jesuit Social Services works to build a just society by advocating for social change and promoting the health and wellbeing of people, families and communities with multiple and complex needs. We work with many people who rely on public and social housing to meet their most basic housing needs, such as those experiencing mental health and substance misuse issues, newly-arrived refugees and migrants, and those exiting prison. Among these groups, many have experienced homelessness, housing instability and stress, as well as other forms of disadvantage. For people with complex needs, we know that homelessness can be both a trigger and compounding factor in their involvement with the justice system. Our experience tells us that the provision of affordable housing helps us to build safer and cohesive communities.

We appreciate the significant role of public and social housing in Victoria, in providing much needed stability and security for many disadvantaged people. The security and stability of long-term housing can help set a firm foundation for improving the prospects and well-being of disadvantaged people, enhancing their personal agency and addressing the underlying issues of their disadvantage. For some, safe, affordable and supported housing can be fundamental to their ability to get their lives back on track. As such, we welcome the Victorian Government's steps towards increasing public and social housing stock and improving current dwellings to be more suitable for existing tenants.

Please see below our responses to several points in the terms of reference relevant to our work.

- 1.** We welcome the proposed ten per cent increase in public housing stock announced as part of this renewal program. However, we also note the significant and steadily increasing waiting-list for social housing on the Victoria Housing Register. A ten percent increase in stock appears considerably inadequate to meet growing demand. Recent research by Professor Terry Burke suggests that Victoria's social housing stock must increase by 3000 per year in order to meet demand from the most disadvantaged Victorians.¹ We call for a further increase in social housing stock.
- 2.** We note the current shortfall in single person dwellings available in public housing, which is insufficient to address increasing demand for this dwelling type. We support the development of a diverse mix of dwelling types in any new public-private redevelopment (including an increase

¹ See Professor Terry Burke, [Quantifying the shortfall of Social and Affordable Housing](#), Community Housing Federation of Victoria, November 2016.

in stock suitable for singles), rather than a concentration of a single type, which risks creating clusters of cohorts with complex needs.

- 3.** We consider that there are already well-established relocation processes in place to support current public housing tenants who will be affected by redevelopment works. These processes allow for appropriate transfers accommodating the needs of tenants and include the option of return for those who wish to. We support those mechanisms which give voice and control to effected tenants over their long-term accommodation decisions.
- 4.** We support the promotion of mixed and genuinely equitable communities amid private-public redevelopments. Both private and public residents should enjoy shared facilities and equitable treatment in these developments.
- 5.** We recognise the pressing need for redevelopment in those estates that have been earmarked for this renewal project. In particular, we note that those ‘walk-up’ structures that have been targeted for redevelopment are clearly no longer fit for purpose. We support their replacement with accessible, contemporary and ecologically responsible structures.
- 6.** The public housing renewal program should provide facilities and support services to ensure that public housing estates cultivate socially cohesive and well-functioning communities. We expect the renewal program will maintain appropriate amenities for young people (i.e. playgrounds, sporting ovals/courts, recreational facilities) as well as other spaces that foster social connections, health and well-being, such as community gardens and community centres. The renewal program should maintain and improve the provision of support services to tenants.
- 9.** We would like to note the importance of maintaining meaningful community sector consultation on this renewal program, particularly those existing support service providers presently active in the affected public housing estates.
- 11.** We note the success of the Kensington renewal project in which amenities were expanded and strengthened and in which a productive relationship with local council authorities was maintained.
- 12.** We encourage the exploration and promotion of more innovative responses to improving Victoria’s public housing system. As per our previous advocacy in this area (for example, our submissions to the [2017-18 Victorian Budget](#) and the Productivity Commission’s [Inquiry into Introducing Competition and Informed User Choice into Human Services](#)), we call for the Government to:

 - invest in a diversity of housing options for people with multiple and complex needs (including increased public and community housing stock, head-leasing and housing first initiatives to assist people who face barriers entering the private rental market or accessing social housing; and expanding supported housing options for people who do not have adequate independent living skills and/or require supported living arrangements) and provide incentives for social housing providers to offer housing to complex and high support participants

- provide funding for supported housing models, such as Next Steps and Perry House, for vulnerable women who require supported living arrangements
- immediately increase capital funds to develop new housing stock, along with investment for housing support to enable people to maintain their tenancy
- strengthen and make consistent financial incentives (such as increasing the allowance for tenancy management) across the public and social housing sectors to ensure that people with high support needs are not disadvantaged
- introduce specific housing initiatives for singles and young people with high and complex support needs (including experience of trauma)
- introduce and strengthen measures (such as eligibility criteria and safeguards/regulations) to protect social housing households, especially for vulnerable groups presenting with challenging behaviours
- leverage capital through partnerships with the for-profit sector based on innovative models across Australia, such as Common Ground and Grocon residential developments
- create more opportunities for tenants and community sector providers to have a voice and actively participate in the process of designing the social housing system and informing ongoing improvements
- strengthen incentives for the private sector to invest in social housing.

Jesuit Social Services respectfully asks that you take these comments into account when reporting on the Public Housing Renewal Program. We would welcome the opportunity to expand further on the matters raised in this submission.

Yours sincerely



Sally Parnell
Acting CEO, Jesuit Social Services