



South Australian Government Maintenance Review Submission – Anti-Poverty Network SA

Anti-Poverty Network SA (APNSA), an organisation composed of public housing tenants, and other low-income people, writes this submission in acknowledgement that a public housing maintenance review is underway and was needed, and an overhaul, even more so needed.

The South Australian Housing Trust has a long and important history within South Australia, and at its height, was directly building thousands of houses a year and maintaining thousands more. These homes were by South Australians, for South Australians, and the level of investment that multiple sides of politics placed into the SA Housing Trust from 1936 until the early 1990s ensured that public housing was at a higher standard than in many other jurisdictions in Australia and was more widespread, meaning homes for the working class, and more real social mix.

Since the 1990s in particular, the maintenance and construction of South Australian Housing Trust homes and infrastructure has been outsourced. This is in addition to sales of tens of thousands of SA Housing Trust homes, land, and associated community infrastructure.

We know what turning over maintenance, construction, and other services of the SA Housing Trust to the private sector has led to: sub-contractors not being paid properly (as reported in the Advertiser earlier this year, and which is a direct consequence of outsourcing), workers not being paid what they are worth with less job security, tenants not having high quality homes to live in and waiting longer periods of time for maintenance, and a declining reputation of public housing within South Australia.

The decline of quality public housing is a major driver of the housing crisis affecting South Australians, and this housing crisis is decades in the making, and due to poor decisions taken by governments.

This all must change. That's why we, an organisation composed of many low-income people, including public housing tenants, are urging the South Australian government and the South Australian Housing Trust to ensure that this review is not a quick bandaid, or a PR move, and to bring maintenance services back in-house to the South Australian Housing Trust as a start to rebuilding a once great institution.

There are many reasons we believe public housing maintenance must be brought back in house:

1. The South Australian Housing Trust directly employing trades people instead of relying on contractors for many jobs could lead to better wages and more job security for employees, and would mean that employees would no longer have to rely on their employer, and the head contractor (currently Spotless) to pay them properly and deliver the right working conditions. Instead, they could rely on the South Australian Housing Trust directly.
2. The South Australian Housing Trust can and should work with High Schools, Technical Colleges, and TAFE SA to deliver more apprenticeships and the opportunity of a safe, secure, well paid career with the SA Housing Trust, maintaining and working on Public Housing.
3. The South Australian Housing Trust could deliver maintenance services without any profit motive, ensuring more money spent on maintenance goes toward maintaining and improving public housing, as well as creating more and better employment.
4. Public Housing is too often failing the people who need it most. While it should be massively expanded in number to ensure every person on the 15,000+ person waitlist has a home, and also eventually available on a universal access basis, it currently isn't. Public Housing almost completely serves those who are some of the most vulnerable: older persons, disabled people, those on very low incomes, First Nations people, and refugees to name a few. While we should be proud that public housing can be there for some people within these groups, the quality of housing they experience is often lacking due to decades of underfunding, outsourcing, and privatisation.

While we acknowledge that this would take some time to fully implement, and that there can be a role for some contracting out of works for some specialist jobs such as asbestos and hazardous materials removal, other work can be, and once was,

conducted in house including some plumbing and electrical jobs, painting, carpentry, etc.

Maintenance was outsourced, the SA Housing Trust was placed into decline in a deliberate ideological attempt to dismantle our public housing system as well as what was stable, secure employment in the public sector. We must move past this as a state.

Interstate, other unions and groups have also been calling for insourcing of maintenance and/or construction of public housing. In the ACT, the territory government has committed to some maintenance insourcing, and it's likely more is to come.

South Australians deserve a Housing Trust and public housing system that they can once again be proud of, one that delivers improved working conditions, better pay, and quality housing. Beginning the process of bringing maintenance back in house, and considering doing the same with construction and planning, would go a very long way to ensuring this.

We urge you to bring maintenance services back in-house as soon as possible, and to treat housing as the human right it is.

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