



Rebuilding Public Housing

Why We Cannot Fix The Housing Crisis Without Reviving The Housing Trust

What Happened To Public Housing?

Did you know that there was once a time where 1 in 3 new homes in SA were public housing?

Over more than four decades, until the 1980s, the SA Housing Trust built some 95,000 homes, at the time, more than a fifth of the state's total housing stock.

This affordable, good-quality housing was not just for those on the very lowest incomes, but for broad layers of the community, including workers.

All this changed from the 80s onwards – especially after 2000, when around 20,000 public homes were sold off, in the following 2 decades. Today, public housing makes up only about 4% of SA's total housing stock. This dramatic reversal hurt not just those on the lowest incomes, but many others too, by helping set off today's never-ending explosion in housing prices and rents.

What Is The State Government Doing?

Latest Productivity Commission data tell us there are almost 14,000 people on SA's waiting list for public housing—including more than 3,000 people assessed as 'Category 1', having the most urgent need. But those numbers understate the crisis.

Many people who need public housing do not apply, demoralised by knowing they would have to wait for many years. Meanwhile, rents continue to soar, pricing extra people out of the private market, especially those on the lowest incomes—and onto the public housing lists.

What is the Malinauskas Government doing to deal with the crisis? Basically, it is taking only limited, token steps. Major sell-offs of public housing have ended, and new public homes are being built for the first time in years.

But it is the number of new homes that is critical. Delve into these numbers, and it emerges that for the homeless, and for people in insecure housing, the government's promises are a slap in the face.

To house 14,000-plus people, the State Government, with extra support through Federal Government funding, has pledged to build 1,000 new public homes by the end of 2026. But, for the years after 2026, the promises have been kept weak and vague.

SACOSS analysis indicates that 350 new public homes per year will be needed just to



keep up with population growth, but current commitments fall well below this.

The State Government currently is planning to build between 87-201 new public homes per year, after this year, according to the Housing Roadmap.

The truth is that the State Government—along with the Federal Labor Government that holds the purse-strings—has no intention of angering the property speculators, developers, and tax-dodgers who profit from today's wild real estate boom.

How Much Public Housing Do We Need to Fix the Crisis?

We need thousands, and ultimately, tens of thousands, of new public homes, not hundreds.

Anti-Poverty Network SA calls for a long-term public housing commitment: at least 20,000 new public homes!!

Building these new homes will take time, which is why we also need more immediate action, such as a temporary, 2-year rent-freeze, followed by strict caps on increases; urgent government action on private homes that sit empty for years; and tighter regulation of (AirBnBs) must be tightly regulated.

There is no silver bullet for the housing crisis. But, if we do not rebuild our public housing estate, we will never return housing values to levels affordable for the community.

A commitment to 20,000 new public homes (and quality, well-insulated and designed public homes) would reverse the 20,000 public homes sold between 2000-2022. This would be a good start (we have a larger population now than we did in 2000).

We know building these numbers of new public homes will not be easy. We will need to grow our construction workforce, and put home-building back into public hands, rather than relying on private developers.

But the task is perfectly achievable. The Housing Trust proved that, multiple times over, in the 1950s and 1960s. To make it all happen, governments need to use their power to bring together the necessary workers and resources. They need to act as if it is an emergency. Because it is.

Produced by Anti-Poverty Network SA.

E: info@apnsa.org Ph: 08 8451 1589 W: apn-sa.org Fb: facebook.com/antipovertynetworksa Insta: instagram.com/antipovertynetworksa

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