



# No Empty Houses In An Emergency

## To House The Homeless—Take Over Empty Dwellings!!

As of Census night in 2021, there were 7,428 homeless people in SA. Since 2021 these numbers are estimated to have grown to well over 8000.

Yet, SA has no shortage of housing. At the time of the last Census, 7.0% of dwellings in Greater Adelaide were unoccupied. That was a total of about 40,000 premises, with more in regional areas.

Other sources back these figures up. Real estate industry data indicate that in 2024, the vacancy rate in Adelaide suburbs was typically in the range of 5-8%.

While there are legitimate reasons a house may be unoccupied, *“about half the properties identified in the Census as unoccupied could potentially be used to provide short, medium and in some cases long-term accommodation for people in housing need”*.

This means that just half of Greater Adelaide’s current empty houses (about 20,000 dwellings) would easily house all the state’s homeless, as well as most of the almost 14,000 people on the public housing wait list.

### **Why Are These Dwellings Empty?**

Many houses and units are unoccupied due to speculation in the housing market.

In December 2025, more than 40% of all housing loans nationally were granted to investors—people buying their second or more additional properties, not people buying a place to live in. Typically, the investors aim to sell within a few years for a big mark-up.

Real estate agents consulted for recent ShelterSA research *“made clear that selling an empty home or property is easier without a tenant”* and that *“an untenanted property can attract a higher selling price”*.

### **What Needs To Be Done?**

Housing supply needs to be increased—fast—and one of the best ways to do this is to bring existing housing into play.

The 20,000 vacant dwellings identified by Shelter SA as potentially available would be more than enough to bring Adelaide’s rental market into balance, with the vacancy rate lifting to 2.5%, from 0.9%.



Rents would likely fall, and the pressure from housing speculation would reduce. This would in turn reduce financial stress for thousands of renters who continue to face rental increases above the rate of inflation and increases to wages.

An increased vacancy rate and reduced power for investor speculation would also help low-income earners and prospective owner-occupiers compete against better-financed investor applicants.

### **How Do We Do It?**

There are many options for managing SA's vacant housing problem.

Research from the UK suggests low-interest loans to help owners restore vacant dwellings to lettable condition, with dedicated local officers to broker the reuse of empty properties.

Steep penalties could be applied on top of Council rates for owners unwilling to engage with efforts to restore and/or rent investment properties. Laws could be put in place giving local governments the power to take over premises and rent them.

In the worst cases of house-hoarding, the formula would be: "Let it or Lose it!" Orders would be issued for compulsory purchase at market-value.

As in Britain, South Australia's government has the right to acquire property compulsorily, provided that the owner is compensated fairly, and there is a genuine public purpose.

Such a purpose is clear when thousands of people are couch-surfing, living in their cars, or sleeping rough, and we have the power and means to provide them with access to housing. An emergency is an emergency: housing must be for people before profit.

Produced by Anti-Poverty Network SA.

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Further Info: [apn-sa.org/2026/02/15/position-statement-no-empty-homes-in-a-crisis](http://apn-sa.org/2026/02/15/position-statement-no-empty-homes-in-a-crisis)