

May 2026

Inquiry submission: Select
**Committee on Intergenerational
Housing Inequality**

About UnitingCare Australia

UnitingCare Australia is the national body for the Uniting Church's community services network and an agency of the Assembly of the Uniting Church in Australia.

We give voice to the Uniting Church's commitment to social justice through advocacy and by strengthening community service provision.

We are the largest network of social service providers in Australia, with over 55,000 staff and 17,000 volunteers, delivering 5.8 million interactions annually across 1,600 service locations in urban, rural and remote communities.

We focus on articulating and meeting the needs of people at all stages of life, and particularly those most vulnerable.

Contact

UnitingCare Australia
Level 3, 42 Macquarie Street,
Barton ACT 2600

P: (02) 6249 6717

E: ucareadmin@nat.unitingcare.org.au

Introduction

UnitingCare Australia welcomes the opportunity to make this submission to the Select Committee on Intergenerational Housing Inequality. As the national body for the Uniting Church's community services network, UnitingCare Australia represents organisations delivering services across housing, homelessness, aged care, disability, family and domestic violence, mental health and emergency relief in communities throughout Australia.

Across our service network, housing insecurity is consistently identified as one of the most significant barriers preventing people from achieving positive social, health and wellbeing outcomes. While public discussion of housing inequality often focuses on differences between younger and older generations, our services see daily evidence that housing inequality is also deeply experienced within generations and accumulates across the life course.

This submission draws on the direct experience of UnitingCare service providers to illustrate how current housing policy settings contribute to intergenerational and intragenerational inequality, increase demand for crisis services, and shift costs onto health, care and community systems. It also outlines policy options to rebalance housing settings toward prevention, security and long-term wellbeing for current and future generations.

➤ Recommendations

Recommendation 1: Embed housing into social security settings

The Commonwealth should modernise the *Social Security Act 1991* to explicitly recognise housing security, at a population level, as a core system objective, integral to whether the social security system functions as intended.

Currently, the Act treats housing as a peripheral issue—recognised narrowly through Commonwealth Rent Assistance and limited references to personal circumstances—rather than as a foundational determinant of income adequacy, participation and wellbeing. As a result, payment design, compliance settings and system architecture are poorly aligned with contemporary housing costs, instability and rental market conditions.

Modernisation of the Act in relation to housing should:

- Introduce a clear object or guiding principle recognising housing security as essential to preventing poverty, supporting participation in work, education and care, and reducing reliance on crisis and emergency systems.
- Require systematic consideration of housing costs in income support architecture, including rate-setting principles, indexation methodologies and adequacy reviews.
- Recognise housing instability as a structural risk factor, not merely a personal circumstance, by enabling flexibility during periods of housing stress, adjusting compliance and reporting where accommodation is unstable, and avoiding punitive settings that exacerbate housing precarity.
- Clarify the role of Commonwealth Rent Assistance within the Act by considering its role alongside base payment adequacy rather than as a technical add-on.
- Improve system navigation where housing and income support intersect, including smoother transitions during housing disruption, reduced administrative burden at moments of high risk, and stronger alignment with homelessness and housing assistance responses.
- Require periodic assessment of housing-related impacts on the social security system, including the effects of housing costs, rental market conditions, and access to social and community housing.

Recommendation 2: Establish a national community housing framework backed by permanent investment

The Commonwealth Government should develop a Community Housing Framework that supports community housing to be planned and commissioned alongside community care and support services, including aged care, disability, family and mental health services. The framework would encourage integrated, place-based models, rather than treating housing and care as separate policy domains, so that housing functions as enabling social infrastructure for wellbeing. Evidence from UnitingCare network providers shows that co-location of housing and services reduces isolation and strengthens prevention.

To realise this Framework, Commonwealth Government investment in community housing must move beyond episodic funding rounds towards a permanent, open funding process that

provides certainty, reduces administrative burden and aligns with community housing development realities. This funding mechanism should offer rolling access to capital grants and concessional, recyclable finance, recognising that different housing models require different financing approaches. Importantly, concessional finance should be designed to reduce overall debt exposure, enabling not for profit Community Housing Providers (CHPs) to remain financially sustainable and reinvest in future supply, rather than relying on increasingly debt heavy models that constrain long term delivery.

Housing should also be at the centre of the [National Prevention and Early Intervention Framework](#), recommended to the Commonwealth Government by the Productivity Commission as a new approach to investment in the care and support sector. A preventative approach to housing would help reduce demand for crisis, care and emergency services. As a national provider of community services and community housing, UnitingCare Australia's experience demonstrates that funding for housing is a foundational investment that reduces long-term system costs and improves outcomes across the life course.

Recommendation 3: Enable not-for-profit providers, including faith-based providers, to contribute more effectively to community housing supply

The Commonwealth Government should strengthen the capacity of not-for-profit community housing providers, including faith-based providers, to contribute to housing solutions by using federal policy, funding and intergovernmental levers to remove structural barriers to delivery.

This should be achieved through:

- Recognising not-for-profit providers—including faith-based organisations—as long-term partners in the delivery and stewardship of social and community housing.
- Using funding programs and intergovernmental agreements to incentivise planning and regulatory settings that reduce delay, risk and cost for community-aligned housing projects.
- Supporting clearer zoning, streamlined approvals and fit-for-purpose planning pathways for social and community housing, regardless of land tenure or proponent type.

Experience across the UnitingCare Network demonstrates that, when regulatory and funding settings align, not-for-profit providers—including faith-based providers—can mobilise land, assets and local capability to deliver mixed-use, community-integrated housing that responds directly to local need. Unlocking this capacity accelerates supply and improves outcomes without requiring the creation of new delivery systems.

Recommendation 4: Treat housing as essential infrastructure for care and support workforce sustainability

Housing underpins the care and support system both in terms of providing accommodation for people who need care, as well as enabling the care workforce to be housed and thereby deliver support to all who need it. Both areas must be adequately resourced by Government to ensure access, equity and system sustainability.

For many people in aged care, disability and other care settings, accommodation is not optional—it is a core part of the support they receive. Current funding settings do not adequately reflect this role, limiting access for people with higher needs or limited means and creating avoidable system pressure. The Commonwealth Government should:

- Treat residential and supported care settings as a core form of housing provision within the care system.
- Ensure accommodation funding reflects the real cost of providing safe, quality housing for people with higher needs or low means.
- Strengthen supported accommodation mechanisms so access to care is based on need, not capacity to pay—for example, through ensuring the Aged Care Accommodation Supplement is adequate to support the provision of care for residents with limited financial means.

Housing shortages—particularly in regional and high-cost areas—are also directly undermining recruitment, retention and service continuity across the care and support sector. In many communities, services cannot expand or even remain viable because workers cannot secure housing. The Commonwealth Government should:

- Treat workforce housing as essential enabling infrastructure, not a peripheral housing issue.
- Provide capital funding to support workforce-linked housing for care services.
- Use capital assistance programs and partnerships with not-for-profit and community housing providers to deliver housing in thin and regional markets.

↘ **The extent and nature of intergenerational housing inequality in Australia across housing tenure types**

Housing inequality within generations (not just between)

While housing inequality is *intergenerational*, it is also *intragenerational*. Housing unaffordability has worsened dramatically over the past decades, with rents and property prices rising faster than wage growth. This has meant that the financial barrier to housing security (either through renting or ownership) is much higher for younger people than for older generations. However, the housing crisis is also experienced differently within generations. While the focus on how housing has become more unaffordable for Millennials and Generation Z than for Baby Boomers highlights an important and growing inequity, it also hides the reality that housing insecurity is experienced more widely.

Intragenerational divides are evident among single-parent households, people with disability, and women experiencing family and domestic violence. In each case, housing insecurity is not explained by age alone, but by the interaction between income adequacy, structural barriers, and the design of the housing system itself. Incomes that are insufficient to meet contemporary rental costs (whether derived from wages or social security) intersect with constraints such as insecure employment, caring responsibilities, disability, discrimination, and limited access to social housing. These pressures are compounded by a housing system that primarily relies on the private market to deliver affordability and security, despite its structural inability to do so for people on low or fixed incomes.

Housing inequality across tenure types

Home ownership increasingly determines not only housing security, but long-term financial stability, access to opportunity and resilience to economic shocks. Across generations, those who own their homes (particularly outright) benefit from lower living costs over time and the accumulation of wealth, while long-term renters face persistent insecurity, limited capacity to save, and heightened exposure to cost-of-living pressures. As younger Australians are locked out of home ownership for longer, and as renting extends well into older age for many, renting has shifted from a transitional stage to a life-long condition for a growing population share.

This divide between owners and renters cuts across generations and compounds existing disadvantage. It reinforces inequality over time, as housing wealth increasingly shapes intergenerational transfers and life chances, while those without access to secure tenure are more likely to experience housing stress, poorer health outcomes and continued reliance on support.

Australia's housing system also struggles to use existing housing stock efficiently across the life course. For an ageing population, two planning levers are particularly important: the availability of smaller, accessible dwellings and well-designed seniors housing located close to services. Many older Australians are interested in right-sizing from large family homes into more manageable housing, but are constrained by limited supply, poor design, unsuitable locations and unaffordability. As a result, many remain in larger dwellings for longer than needed, not by preference, but due to a lack of viable alternatives. This has system-wide effects: it limits older people's capacity to age well in place, delays the release of larger homes

into the market for families, and contributes to inefficient use of housing stock across generations. Well-designed seniors housing can improve health and wellbeing outcomes for older people while also reducing pressure on health systems and enabling better matching of housing to need across the community. Addressing these gaps is not about encouraging density for its own sake, but about delivering the right mix of housing types so that people at different life stages can access homes that support security, participation and wellbeing.

↘ **The experience of intergenerational housing inequality on different population cohorts, including but not limited to socioeconomic, gender, geographical location, disability, ethnicity and racial status**

Housing as a barrier to achieving positive social, health, and wellbeing outcomes

Across the UnitingCare network, community service providers identify housing as a key barrier preventing the individuals they support from achieving desired outcomes. The provision of long-term stable housing is an essential first step in supporting individuals with complex social, health and mental health needs. Housing enables social participation, inclusion and integration, allowing individuals to recover from addiction or escape family violence, for example.

Investment in social housing should be understood as investment in preventative social infrastructure, rather than solely as a housing or welfare expense. Secure, affordable housing reduces demand for crisis-driven and high-cost services by stabilising people's lives before needs escalate. Across the UnitingCare network, providers consistently observe that when people have access to stable housing, they are better able to engage with health care, mental health and alcohol and other drug services, sustain employment or education, and maintain family and community connections. Conversely, housing insecurity increases reliance on emergency health services, homelessness responses, child protection, and acute mental health care. Strengthening the supply of social housing therefore delivers long-term social and fiscal benefits by addressing the upstream drivers of disadvantage and reducing pressure on community services that are currently responding to preventable crises.

Women escaping family violence

Housing unaffordability is a key barrier preventing women and children from escaping family violence. Across the UnitingCare network, organisations identify family violence as a leading cause of housing precarity and homelessness for women and children. [The Australian Institute of Health and Welfare's Family, Domestic and Sexual Violence Data Report](#) shows 40% of people assisted by specialist homelessness services have experienced family violence. In many cases, women and children escaping violence enter emergency accommodation, such as motels, for prolonged periods. These forms of crisis accommodation are often not secure, leaving women and children at risk of harm, and are therefore not a replacement for purpose-built facilities. They are also not substitutes for suitable long-term housing, such as houses or apartments, because they do not provide basic needs including adequate space and cooking facilities.

Older people in private rentals

While many older people own their homes outright, those who rent experience high rates of housing insecurity and financial hardship. [The Grattan Institute's Renting in Retirement Report](#) found that 67% of retirees who rent in the private market are living in poverty, with single, separated or divorced women most at risk. Older people relying on pensions to cover rents and living costs often suffer from financial stress, forcing them to make difficult budgeting decisions about what expenses to cover on a fixed income. [Anglicare Australia's Rental Affordability Snapshot](#) further shows that a single pensioner can afford just 0.3% of rental listings nationally, even after receiving maximum rent assistance. As rents rise faster than pensions, many older people are forced to either go without adequate heating or food to cover housing costs, or to deplete savings and superannuation, or both.

As a result, this raises the risk that this cohort will enter poverty as they age, which in turn exacerbates aged-related health, mental health, and social issues. It also undermines the ability to age well in the home, including by increasing the risk they will live in inadequate or poorly adapted accommodation, or in houses which are isolated from services and supports they need. One result is that this cohort are at increased risk of displacement, or of entering residential aged care or hospital earlier than they otherwise would, because they are no longer able to live safely in their homes. From a broader wellbeing perspective, this erodes dignity, particularly during experiences of homelessness or insecure housing.

Low-income families

Low-income families with children are an increasingly visible yet poorly served cohort within Australia's housing system. Many experience acute housing insecurity, including periods of living in cars or other temporary arrangements, but do not always meet the thresholds for homelessness services or align neatly with crisis-based responses. These families often remain connected to work, education and community, and their primary need is not intensive homelessness support but timely, practical assistance to stabilise housing and re-enter the private rental market before circumstances deteriorate. When support is unavailable at this point, families can quickly slip into deeper crisis, with significant consequences for children's wellbeing, health and educational continuity. Without mechanisms to support families at this intermediate stage, policy settings risk reinforcing a reactive system that responds once families have already fallen into homelessness, rather than preventing harm and preserving stability for children and parents alike.

Housing insecurity as a driver of demand for emergency relief services

The UnitingCare network is one the largest providers of emergency relief services in Australia. The experience of these providers is that many individuals seek to access emergency relief because after covering their housing costs, they have insufficient finances remaining to cover the cost of necessities, including food and medicine. [Uniting Victoria and Tasmania's Too Critical to Fail: Emergency Relief Services Report](#) notes that after mental healthcare, housing and homelessness supports are the second most common service that emergency relief recipients are referred to. Needing to access emergency relief is not just limited to individuals receiving income support payments, but is increasingly the experience of households with one or more adults engaged in part-time or even full-time employment.

While the decision of whether to cover housing costs or pay for other basic needs is experienced by individuals across housing tenure types, including mortgage holders, it is particularly acute among private renters. Over the past decades, rents have soared, becoming unaffordable for a growing portion of the population and pushing individuals into housing precarity and homelessness. Even when individuals manage to secure a rental property, which is increasingly difficult due to severe shortages across the country, they often have limited or no capacity to absorb rent rises, forcing them to access emergency relief to prevent losing their home. In addition, they often experience poor mental and physical health, addiction, and other challenges, which are being driven or exacerbated by housing unaffordability.

Housing insecurity across the life course

Housing insecurity is not experienced as a single event, but accumulates across the life course. For example, children raised in insecure housing conditions are more likely to experience disrupted education and poor health; young adults facing unaffordable rents delay independence and family formation; and people who spend much of their working lives renting face heightened risk of poverty and homelessness in older age. Without intervention, today's housing insecurity becomes tomorrow's aged care, health and income support crisis.

Taken together, these experiences reflect not individual failure, but structural weaknesses in Australia's housing system that are shaped by Commonwealth policy settings.

↘ **The causes of intergenerational housing inequality, including nature and rates of construction, rental policies and practices, tax settings, homelessness policies, lending rules, and public and social housing practices and investment**

Prioritisation of ownership and investment under current housing policy settings

Current Commonwealth Government housing policy settings prioritise home ownership rather than ensuring the basic need of all Australians for safe and healthy housing is met. The first home buyer scheme enables a greater proportion of individuals to enter the housing market. Yet housing inequality continues to grow, with an increasing cohort of people accessing housing support and emergency relief services because of housing unaffordability.

Policy settings also reward property investment rather than provide population level housing security. Negative gearing and capital gains tax discounts encourage high-income earners to utilize property as an asset for wealth generation. These policies prioritise the financial value of a house over the emotional, physical and social value of a home, worsening inequality between those who profit from property price growth and those who struggle to afford a place to live.

Current rental policy settings further entrench inequality by privileging flexibility and returns for property owners over security for renters. Default short lease terms, the absence of meaningful caps on rent increases, and the continued availability of no-grounds evictions expose long-term renters to ongoing instability. As people rent for longer, insecurity that was once transitional is increasingly lifelong.

While housing delivery involves all levels of government, Commonwealth policy settings play a decisive role in shaping housing outcomes through taxation, income support, rent assistance, housing investment and national housing frameworks. These settings influence not only who can access housing, but the relative balance between ownership, private rental and social housing across generations. Without recalibration at the Commonwealth level, state and territory efforts will continue to operate within a system that structurally favours asset accumulation over housing security.

If current housing policy settings remain unchanged, housing inequality will continue to worsen. A growing share of Australians will reach retirement without housing security, placing increasing pressure on pensions, aged care, health and homelessness systems. For younger generations, prolonged housing insecurity will constrain workforce participation, productivity and family formation, undermining social cohesion and long-term economic resilience.

Underinvestment in public, social, and community housing

Sustained underinvestment in public, social, and community housing over past decades by both the Commonwealth Government and state and territory governments has fundamentally weakened Australia's housing system and contributed to inequality. Social housing now plays a residual role, primarily servicing people in acute crisis, rather than providing a stable and affordable housing option across the life course. As a result, low-income households within all generations are increasingly pushed into the private rental market, where rising rents and insecure tenure undermine long-term housing stability.

While increasing housing supply is essential, current Commonwealth Government investment programs for community housing providers skew incentives to prioritise high-density development simply to maximise unit numbers. Effective housing systems require a mix of housing types across the continuum to meet the diverse needs of individuals and households, including families, older people, people with disability, and workers. In regional and rural communities in particular, high-density social housing can be visibly distinct from nearby private housing, worsening stigma and reinforcing divisions between public and private tenure. Housing that is poorly integrated into local contexts can undermine social inclusion and community acceptance, even if demand is high.

Reactive homelessness policy settings

The lack of housing outside of the private market is worsened by homelessness policy settings which remain predominantly reactive, intervening only after housing has been lost rather than addressing the structural drivers of housing insecurity. This approach entrenches intergenerational disadvantage, as people experiencing housing stress earlier in life are more likely to cycle through homelessness and poor health. The growing demand for emergency relief and homelessness services reflects policy failure, rather than rising need alone. Genuine engagement is needed around how the National Agreement on Social Housing and Homelessness can better recognise and respond to homelessness, as well as better connect housing first approaches with social and affordable housing supply to reduce inequity.

Structural restraints on community housing providers

CHPs within the UnitingCare network have consistently raised concerns about the sustainability of their business models as not-for-profit providers, despite securing project-based Commonwealth funding for certain projects. While this funding has enabled some developments to proceed, rising capital and construction costs have significantly eroded already narrow margins. Unlike private providers, not-for-profit community housing organisations set rents below market levels, retain assets for long-term public benefit, and cannot offset cost pressures through rent increases or asset sales.

As a result, many projects generate little or no surplus once debt and operating costs are met, limiting providers' ability to recycle capital, reinvest in future supply, or establish a sustainable development pipeline. This indicates that current funding settings, particularly reliance on project-based grants and debt-heavy financing, are insufficient to support community housing delivery at scale, underscoring the need for more durable, system-wide investment settings if not-for-profit providers are to play a meaningful role in addressing long-term housing need.

Long term investment settings, rather than program-based approaches, are needed. Housing Australia plays a welcome role with the third round of the Housing Australia Future Fund (HAFF). Making financing – especially concessional debt – generally available, rather than limited to HAFF, would be a useful improvement to support more social and affordable homes.

Core policy instruments

The experience of CHPs within the UnitingCare network, and more broadly across the sector, is that the application process for HAFF was complex and challenging to navigate, in large part due to misalignment between strict HAFF timelines and community housing project development timelines. This meant that CHPs could only apply for funding when projects happened to be at exactly the right stage of readiness.

While the National Agreement on Social Housing and Homelessness (NASHH) has strengthened the permanence of Commonwealth Government funding for homelessness services through a dedicated, matched homelessness component, community housing providers have raised concerns that this design can unintentionally reinforce a reactive system. By quarantining a growing share of funding to crisis homelessness responses, the Agreement limits flexibility for states and providers to invest in prevention, tenancy sustainment and social housing supply, which are the very interventions that reduce homelessness over time.

CHPs report that success in preventing or resolving homelessness does not reduce underlying service and workforce costs, yet may weaken future funding signals based on demand, creating a perceived disincentive to shift resources upstream. As a result, while homelessness services funding is protected, the broader housing system remains under-resourced, and providers therefore struggle to achieve sustainable, long-term outcomes.

Planning and regulatory burdens

Community housing providers working with land held by faith-based and community organisations report that government planning frameworks and regulatory controls can significantly delay or prevent the delivery of social and affordable housing. In many

jurisdictions, zoning rules, permissible-use definitions and approval processes were not designed to support community housing on these sites, even where there is strong local support and demonstrated need.

This is reflected in the experience of community housing providers within the UnitingCare network. Providers operating in New South Wales have reported that planning controls affecting church land often do not permit residential or community housing uses as-of-right, requiring lengthy rezoning or planning variation processes before projects can proceed. In South Australia, community housing proposals on land held by faith-based organisations have been constrained by local planning schemes and approval requirements that significantly extend timelines and increase pre-development costs, limiting the feasibility of progressing social housing outcomes. Across jurisdictions, providers have also noted that community housing developments are frequently assessed under approval pathways designed for private or commercial projects, despite their public and non-profit purpose. Together, these regulatory settings have limited the timely activation of land for social and affordable housing, even where providers are ready to deliver projects and funding opportunities exist and can be accessed.

This situation is similar to that outlined by Ezra Klein and Derek Thompson in their 2025 book, *Abundance: How we Build a Better Future*, which outlines how overregulation gets in the way of providing social and affordable housing in the United States. They show that cities in the US with lower levels of zoning restrictions and building regulation have lower levels of homelessness.

Residential aged care settings

Current settings have resulted in insufficient availability of supported residential places within the aged care system for older people with low means, including those living on pensions. Older people who cannot afford to pay expensive refundable accommodation deposits or daily accommodation payments are limited to accessing residential aged care through supported places. These places are funded by the Commonwealth Government paying an accommodation supplement to aged care providers to help cover their costs. However, the current maximum accommodation supplement of just under \$70 per resident per day is insufficient to cover the true cost of delivering residential aged care services, meaning aged care providers are financially limited in their capacity to offer them.

The limited availability of supported residential aged care places and the limited capacity of providers to build more residential aged care homes, contributes directly to housing insecurity among older people with low means. When older people cannot access residential aged care due to the scarcity of affordable supported places, they are often left to remain in unsuitable private rental housing, insecure informal arrangements, or dwellings that no longer meet their care or accessibility needs. This prolongs demand for scarce rental housing stock, increases the risk of homelessness among older people, particularly older women, and creates right-sizing issues by delaying the transition of larger or family-sized dwellings into the broader housing market, where they would be more suitable to larger households. In this way, insufficient supported aged care capacity not only exacerbates housing instability for older Australians, but also has flow-on effects across the housing system that deepen intergenerational housing inequity.

↘ **Policy, legislative and other options for tackling intergenerational housing inequality and evening the playing field for current and future generations**

Social security reform

[UnitingCare Australia's Pre-Budget Submission 2026-27](#) recommends the Commonwealth Government reform the *Social Security Act 1991* to ensure it meets the current needs of Australians during periods of financial stress. Developed over three decades ago, the legislation is not fit for purpose for the current day, in which housing unaffordability has become one of the biggest drivers of financial hardship and housing precarity and homelessness. The social safety net, through income support, crisis payments, and rent assistance, must be transformed to ensure jobseekers and individuals on low incomes have housing security. More than just lifting rent assistance rates, the legislation will need to more substantially transform how the Commonwealth Government supports the growing cohort of people across Australia who do not have stable housing.

Income support and housing assistance settings have not kept pace with soaring housing costs, amplifying intergenerational and intragenerational inequality. Payments such as rent assistance and core income supports fall well short of typical private market rents, leaving recipients exposed to persistent financial stress and housing insecurity. [The Australian Institute of Health and Welfare's Rental Assistance Data Report](#) shows that around two in five households remain in rental stress even after receiving rent assistance. This inadequacy shapes housing outcomes across the life course, contributing to delayed household formation among younger people and rising poverty and housing insecurity among many older Australians.

Community housing investment

Housing policy must prioritise the development of community housing to ensure those most in need have adequate housing. Over the last few decades, there has been a decline in Commonwealth Government spending on community housing. While CHPs within the UnitingCare network have benefited from the Housing Australia Future Fund (HAFF) over the past few years, it is unclear how the Commonwealth Government will continue to support community housing development now that the HAFF funding rounds have finished. We urge the Commonwealth Government to commit to funding that will lift community housing to 10% of Australia's housing stock by 2030. Equally important as meeting this target is doing so through place-appropriate, mixed-tenure and mixed-typology developments that align with local housing markets and community needs. This includes supporting a wider range of community housing models, such as social and affordable rental housing, rent-to-buy and shared equity pathways, limited equity and cooperative housing, co-living models, supported and specialist housing, housing for older people and people with disability, and other intermediate tenure options, so that community housing can respond flexibly to the diverse needs of households across different life stages and income levels.

Whether through a reinstatement of the HAFF or the development of a new community housing grant fund, it will be critical to ensure that future Commonwealth Government

investment in this space provides CHPs with timely financial support through efficient and flexible processes. A future community housing fund should include a rolling application process and provide access to a mix of funding types, recognising that some forms of community housing are best supported through upfront grants, while others are more suited to concessional loans. In particular, increased access to concessional, recyclable financing from the Commonwealth would support long-term supply by enabling capital to be reused over time, reducing reliance on debt-heavy models and ensuring CHPs do not miss opportunities to deliver community housing projects that add to supply and help reduce housing insecurity for vulnerable groups. For not-for-profit community housing providers, concessional finance should complement, not substitute for, capital funding, and be designed to reduce debt.

Case study

Uniting NSW.ACT: Converting retirement villages to rental communities and exploring limited equity housing

Uniting NSW.ACT is concerned more older Australians are reaching retirement as renters, increasing their risk of poverty and an earlier move into residential aged care.

In response, Uniting NSW.ACT has been converting older retirement villages to rental communities. Over a number of years, Uniting NSW.ACT has been seeing longer vacancies when units in retirement villages become available, due to fewer Australians owning their own home and not having the traditional source of funds to move into a retirement home. Now, in 68 villages across NSW and the ACT, as vacancies arise, the homes are made available for older people to rent. This is providing older people more housing options as they age, and keeping village residents and communities connected and thriving.

Uniting NSW.ACT has also been investigating limited equity housing. Limited equity housing offers an intermediate tenure model that sits between renting and full home ownership, providing long-term affordability and security of tenure for low-income households locked out of both markets.

As outlined in the [Uniting NSW.ACT and Fern Report: Limited Equity Affordable Housing](#), limited equity housing models, commonly delivered through housing co-operatives, combine modest resident equity contributions (5–10%) with concessional and guaranteed debt, enabling housing to be delivered at scale without ongoing government cash-flow subsidies. Monthly housing charges are set on a cost-coverage basis rather than market rents, insulating residents from rental price volatility and delivering affordability that improves in real terms as debt is repaid.

International experience in European cities such as Vienna and Zurich demonstrates that limited equity housing can form a significant and durable component of the housing system, reducing long-term demand for social housing while offering stable, secure housing for moderate-income households who would otherwise face prolonged insecurity in the private rental market due to unaffordability.

Connecting housing and care

Current funding settings isolate housing and support services from one another, placing increased strain on CHPs and community service providers. Underinvestment in community housing and poor urban planning regulations increase expenditure within aged care, health, disability, emergency services, and justice system budgets. Current policy fails to recognise housing as core social infrastructure which is central to care and support and therefore wellbeing.

UnitingCare Australia recommends the Commonwealth Government invest in community housing models that prioritise intergenerational living and co-location with community, informal care, and local support services. The experience of our community housing and community service providers is that place-based models like this support housing stability and wellbeing by reducing isolation and strengthening pathways out of crisis. However, this requires greater urban planning flexibility and stronger collaboration between different levels of government to ensure funding for community housing and community services commissioning are joined up, enabling housing and care to mutually reinforce and support one another

Case study

Uniting Communities: UCity Adelaide community housing

UCity Adelaide demonstrates how housing can be intentionally integrated with community services when developments are designed around people.

Delivered by Uniting Communities, the project combines housing with community, hospitality and service functions within a single site, creating a place-based model that strengthens social connection, access to support and ongoing community benefit.

Importantly, UCity was delivered on land controlled by the Uniting Church, showing how faith-based land assets can be strategically leveraged, when there are supportive planning pathways and government partnerships, to deliver mixed-use, mission-aligned housing outcomes that respond to community need while contributing to long-term housing supply.

Reducing regulatory and planning burdens

Although land-use planning and development approvals are primarily the responsibility of state, territory and local governments, the Commonwealth Government has important levers it can use to address the regulatory barriers that limit the utilisation of land held by faith-based and community organisations for social and affordable housing. Through the design of national housing programs and intergovernmental agreements, the Commonwealth can incentivise states and territories to introduce planning pathways that better support community housing on not-for-profit land, such as clearer zoning provisions, streamlined

approvals, or deemed-to-comply frameworks for social housing developments. The Commonwealth can also use funding conditions and bilateral housing agreements to encourage regulatory settings that recognise the public benefit of housing delivered on mission-aligned land and reduce delays that currently prevent these sites from being activated to meet urgent housing need.

Case study

Uniting Vic.Tas: Affordable housing in regional Victoria

At the St Andrews site in Bendigo, Uniting Vic.Tas is delivering affordable housing on Uniting Church land through a place-based approach that responds to regional housing need. The project demonstrates how under-utilised Church land can be sensitively repurposed to deliver housing that is integrated into the local community, supporting social inclusion while retaining the site's civic and community significance.

Wesley Mission: Affordable housing in Canberra

Wesley Mission's affordable housing development in Curtin, ACT shows how Church-controlled land can be used for small-scale, neighbourhood-based housing linked closely to community services. The project integrates housing with ongoing local support, illustrating the value of early, preventative housing interventions that stabilise households before housing insecurity escalates into homelessness.

Improving access to residential aged care

[UnitingCare Australia's Pre-Budget Submission 2026-27](#) recommends the Commonwealth Government increase the accommodation supplement to at least \$150 per resident per day. This would directly improve the financial viability of supported residential aged care places, enabling providers to expand supply for older people with low means who cannot afford refundable accommodation deposits or daily accommodation payments. From a housing perspective, this is significant because residential aged care functions as a critical part of the housing continuum for older Australians. When supported places are under-supplied, older people remain in insecure or unsuitable housing, often private rental accommodation or informal arrangements, beyond the point at which their care and housing needs can be met.

By making supported residential aged care financially viable for providers at scale, a higher accommodation supplement would allow older people with low means to transition earlier and more reliably into appropriate, secure accommodation with care. This would reduce housing insecurity among older people themselves, particularly older women, who are disproportionately represented among older renters at risk of homelessness. In turn, it would relieve pressure on the private rental market and enable the release of dwellings that are often larger, poorly suited to ageing in place, or located in high-demand areas, improving housing availability for younger households and families.

Importantly, increasing the accommodation supplement would also support system-wide efficiency by reducing the number of older people “stuck” in inappropriate housing because there is nowhere affordable to move to within the aged care system. This includes situations where older people cycle between hospital, short-term accommodation, and precarious housing due to lack of supported residential places. Addressing this bottleneck strengthens housing stability across the life course and helps ensure housing stock is used appropriately across generations, rather than being shaped by funding constraints in aged care.

Dedicated housing to strengthen the care and support workforce

UnitingCare Australia recommends the Commonwealth Government invest in targeted and dedicated workforce-linked housing solutions to support care and support workers in regional Australia. Housing unavailability and unaffordability is a significant barrier to workforce recruitment and retention in these areas. Therefore, support should be in the form of additional housing supply rather than in place of social or community housing. Governments should partner with CHPs in different parts of the country to deliver workforce housing solutions as preventative infrastructure that supports care and support service continuity and reduces system pressure.

There are strong examples across the UnitingCare network where aged care providers, often in partnership with CHPs, have delivered workforce housing in response to acute local shortages. These initiatives show what is possible when housing is seen as essential infrastructure for care and support delivery and where limited Commonwealth Government capital support, such as through the Aged Care Capital Assistance Program (ACCAP), is available. However, they also highlight the constraints of current funding arrangements. ACCAP is competitive, time-limited and episodic in nature, and typically requires substantial co-investment from providers. As a result of this, workforce housing projects can proceed only on a one-off basis and rely heavily on providers’ balance-sheet capacity, rather than a sustainable or scalable funding model. Without stronger and more durable Commonwealth Government support, including settings designed to support delivery at scale, workforce housing initiatives remain the exception rather than a systemic solution, despite clear evidence of need.

Case study

Juniper: Regional aged care staff housing in WA

In Katanning, WA, a tight rental market has created a shortage of aged care workers, undermining workforce recruitment and retention. To address this, Juniper developed dedicated staff housing next to its Bethshan Residential Aged Care Home, supported by Commonwealth funding through the Aged Care Capital Assistance Program.

Juniper has undertaken a similar workforce housing initiative in Fitzroy Crossing, delivering modular homes for staff at its Guwardi Ngadu Residential Aged Care Home. These projects demonstrate how targeted workforce housing can stabilise the care workforce, support continuity of care, and enable older people to remain connected to their communities and Country.

Conclusion

Intergenerational housing inequality is not simply the result of changing demographics or individual circumstances, but of policy settings that increasingly prioritise property as an asset over housing as essential social infrastructure. The consequences of this imbalance are borne not only by younger Australians, but by people within every generation who experience housing insecurity, poorer health outcomes and heightened reliance on community services.

The experience of the UnitingCare network demonstrates that housing stability is foundational to individual wellbeing, service effectiveness and system sustainability. Continued underinvestment in social and community housing, combined with insufficient income support and housing assistance, will entrench disadvantage and drive further pressure on health, aged care, homelessness and emergency relief systems.

Addressing intergenerational housing inequality requires sustained Commonwealth leadership to rebalance housing policy toward security, prevention and long-term public benefit. Investment in housing as core social infrastructure is essential to ensuring that current and future generations can live with dignity, stability and opportunity.