



MEDIA RELEASE

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WACOSS welcomes Federal housing and homelessness reform commitments

The Council responded to concerns about the wind-up of the Prime Minister's Council on Homelessness by highlighting the opportunities emerging from Federal Social Services Minister Kevin Andrews commitments to reform that National Affordable Housing Agreement (NAHA).

"WACOSS thanks the members of the PM's Council on Homelessness for providing high quality analysis and advice since its inception in 2009," said Irina Cattalini, CEO of WACOSS today.

"The Minister clearly stated, in his speech to the National Housing Conference, that he believes the rate of homelessness to be a critical measurement of the effectiveness of Government policy."

"We are hopeful that his commitment to greater transparency and accountability in housing policy, together with his undertaking to work more closely with community housing and accommodation support providers and industry stakeholders will enable his Government to meet the target of reducing homelessness during his watch."

"We welcome the Minister's comments that he will ensure NAHA reform '*...recognises the need for continuing investment in effective services that provide stable pathways to housing and further training and employment*'," she said.

"We hope to conclude that this means increased investment in community programs that combine housing responses for people transitioning from homelessness with wrap-around support that leads to stable employment outcomes."

While States and Territories have a critical role in addressing barriers to housing supply, the key message of the National Housing Conference was the critical role of Federal reforms in enabling and supporting institutional investment in the development of social and affordable housing to achieve the scale of investment needed to turn around our national housing affordability crisis.

Arguably the biggest single factor in our lack of affordable housing is how current tax settings have driven competition that has pushed up the cost of buying or renting a home without leveraging increased investment in new housing stock.

"We need to rethink our approach to affordable housing so that we see it as a long-term investment in infrastructure that drives the productivity of our economy – the same way we view ports, roads and rail," said Ms Cattalini.

Housing development represents 4.8% of GDP, with 82,000 people employed in housing construction accounting for 0.7% of national employment. The lack of affordable housing for key service workers in our capital cities and regional centres is a huge break on our productivity.

“The continuity of services funded through the National Partnership Agreement on Homelessness (NPAH), which expires in June 2014, is of critical importance.”

This funding agreement provides almost \$320 million in joint funding to tackle homelessness nationwide, including \$76 million in joint funding for capital and development projects that help people move out of homelessness into safe and sustainable housing.

“The community sector is calling on the Minister to ensure that homeless services have continuity of funding beyond June – while the Commonwealth considers reforms to funding mechanisms and the findings of its Commission of Audit – to ensure services do not experience a set-back and we do not see a sudden spike in homeless numbers,” she said.

“We look forward to having the ‘strong, robust and ongoing dialogue’ the Minister has promised with community housing and accommodation support providers as we work together to develop the ‘realistic, pragmatic and long-term solutions’ that are needed to tackle the affordable housing crisis,” concluded Ms Cattalini.

Media Inquiries – Chris Twomey on 0407 725 025 or 9420 7222