

Affordable Housing



Introduction

Housing which is conducive to health and wellbeing is a place of shelter and safety. Within the Commonwealth of Australia, there is bipartisan recognition that housing is one of the most important current social issues.

Baptcare believes that safe, secure, appropriate and affordable housing is a basic human right for Australians of all ages and is foundational to the wellbeing of individuals, families and communities.

Baptcare is committed to improving access to affordable housing for aged and disadvantaged people in Victoria and Tasmania. Baptcare delivers services to the most vulnerable in the community including seniors, people with a disability, people with mental health issues, families and children affected by family violence and people experiencing financial difficulties.

It is these groups who face the greatest risk of accessing affordable housing.

History and background

Demand for public housing has exceeded supply in Victoria since the 1980's. With demand outstripping supply in both the private housing market and the public housing sector, many vulnerable and low income Australians are finding it increasingly difficult to access adequate affordable housing. While a range of factors have contributed to Australia's housing crisis, the most obvious has been the growing gap between the increasing demand for housing and the slower rate of construction of new social/affordable housing stock over the past decade. The 2017 budget has made changes to the National Affordable Housing Agreement however the funding amount remains the same.

Baptist Care Australia commends the federal government commitment to working with states and territories to tackle the issue however warns that delays in action will deeply impact the tens of thousands of Australians who are currently homeless. Baptist Care Australia also commends the \$1 billion allocation for a housing bond aggregator scheme but implores government to consult with the not-for-profit sector and finance sector when developing the model.

Current context and situation

Affordable housing is a dwelling that is purchased or rented at a cost that is within the financial means of a household, currently nationally recognised as consisting of 30% household income for wage earners. People can afford other basic life necessities on top of their housing costs.

Home ownership is one of the main strategies Australians use to acquire financial security. Yet housing is the greatest single expense item in most monthly budgets, and many households are finding themselves financially squeezed by high rents or mortgages.

While on average a fifth of household consumption is housing-related, many low income households are spending a third to half of their incomes on housing.

Housing is either affordable or unaffordable compared to an individual's income. Therefore, poverty impacts housing choices. In light of a lack of government investment in increasing financial support to low income families, Baptcare calls on the Commonwealth to institute Social Security policies that provide a liveable income in a society where the poor are facing high housing stress.

Lack of affordable housing primarily impacts people on fixed low incomes, the majority have minimal private rental options that are truly affordable and child-appropriate for families.

Specifically, housing unaffordability most affects disadvantaged seniors, people with a disability, people with mental health issues, individuals and/or families who have family violence, people facing financial catastrophe, Aboriginal communities and newly arrived migrants and refugees.

Baptcare's Mission & Christian Witness

Baptcare has identified the provision of affordable and sustainable housing as one of the contributions our organisation can make towards building community wellbeing and social inclusion. This reflects our Vision of "Communities where every person is cherished" which articulates an aspiration for Baptcare to nurture communities in their entirety, developing and delivering services inclusively to all members.

This arises out of the Biblical view that we are all connected together in society. God's people are encouraged to seek or work toward the 'shalom' of their city (Jeremiah 29:7). Shalom is variously translated or defined as peace, wellbeing, prosperity, welfare, justice, wholeness, harmony of life. It is a concept covering the individual and permeating the entire community. Within this context, one can see the shortage of safe, secure and affordable housing as jeopardising 'shalom', community wellbeing and social inclusion.

Confronting injustice in society means acknowledging current systems are inadequate and unfair. Baptcare focuses on changing systems by using advocacy, developing social policy and generating evidence-based research. God hears the cries of the oppressed and intervenes with justice, calling us to be faithful instruments of justice (Isaiah 42).

To this end, Baptcare is actively entering the housing system and both providing accommodation for individuals in need and advocating to Government and the broader community to change the system.

A better future / what needs to change

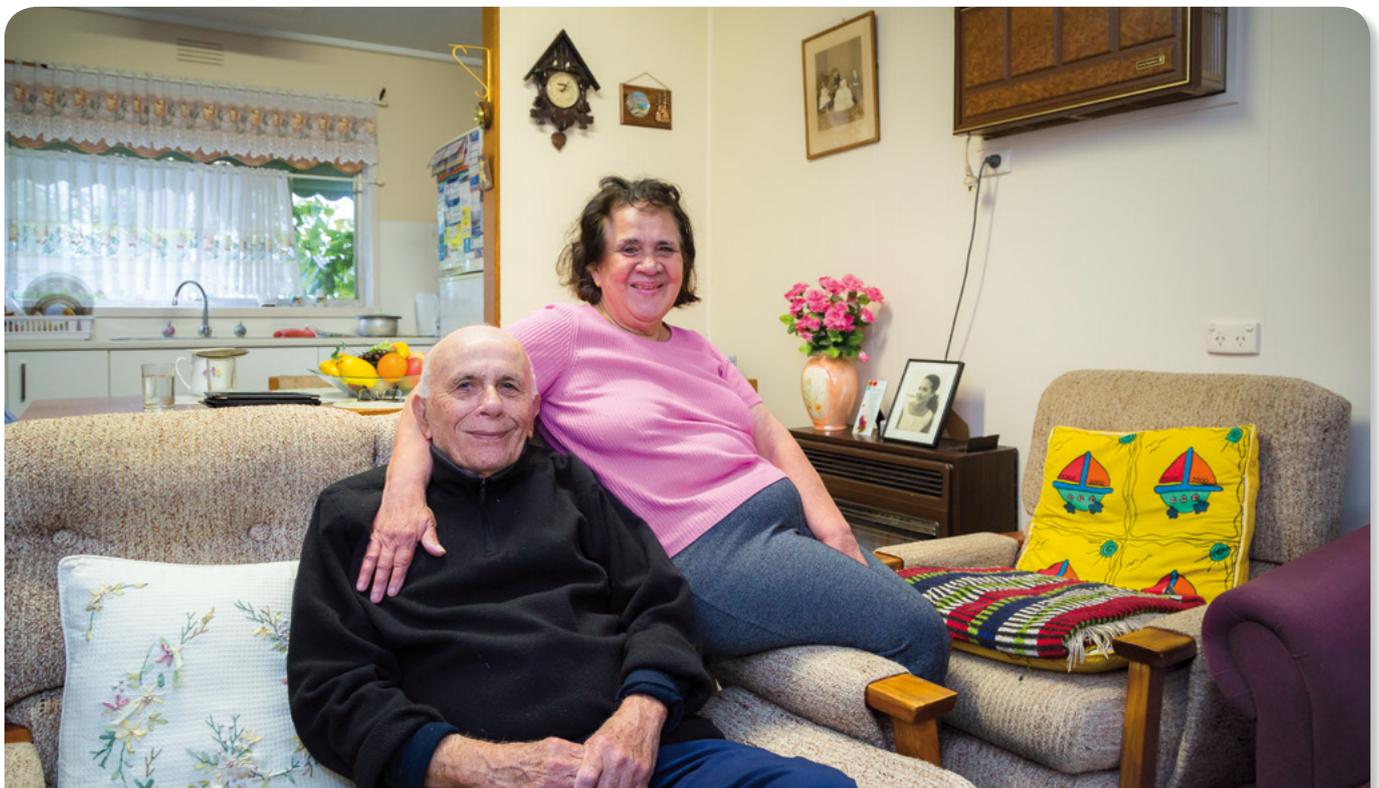
Victoria's welfare and community services sector has identified several foundational criteria for a just and equitable housing sector which delivers the housing outcomes needed in our community.

- **Affordability:** people can pay for housing, while having enough income for daily life necessities
- **Appropriateness:** people's housing is suitable for their needs
- **Accessibility:** people can access housing (housing the incorporates specific needs e.g. level entry, drop down kitchen, gold standard living of design)

Accessible, affordable and appropriate housing is not only important for the safety and security of individuals and families, it also forms part of the foundation on which we build strong sustainable communities. It is only with the experience of stable housing that people are able to put down roots in the local community, feel included, and be motivated to contribute to the society around them.

On the other hand, a lack of affordable housing can have a devastating impact the lives of vulnerable low income households and those in housing crisis through: financial stress, poor quality, unsuitable and overcrowded housing, insecure tenure and forced moves, homelessness and social exclusion.

Effective planning for affordable housing must not only consider the challenges facing us today. We must also factor into housing and town planning predicted challenges of the future such as population growth, changes in household composition, changes in age profile, mortgages or rent continuing into retirement and housing stress. Baptcare encourages all Australians to recognise that housing affordability is a national issue affecting the whole community, one which will determine the nature of the society we are building for the future. In building a sustainable affordable housing sector, the subsidised social housing system plays an important role in providing more secure and more affordable housing than is usually available via the operation of the private housing market alone. As a member of the Victorian Council of Social Services, Baptcare supports the advocacy efforts of several peak bodies on behalf of those Australians disadvantaged by the housing affordability gap.





Policy position

- 1 Baptcare:** Baptcare affirms that access to safe, secure, appropriate and affordable housing is a basic human right of all Australians. We believe this is foundational to an individual or family's long-term participation in a local community. Baptcare is committed to improving access to affordable housing and exploring opportunities for cooperative developments to produce financially viable, high quality housing outcomes.
- 2 Commonwealth, State and Local Government:** Baptcare encourages all tiers of government to recognise housing affordability as a national issue that will determine the society we build into the future and to institute social security policies that provide a liveable income and access to safe and stable accommodation.
- 3 Financial institutions:** Baptcare commends those Australian superannuation funds and investment managers that have signed the United Nations Principles for Responsible Investment and calls on funds, foundations and trusts to invest in ethical, affordable housing projects.
- 4 Churches:** Baptcare encourages churches to consider the role they can play in affordable housing provision and calls on Christian landlords to consider providing security of tenure and meet the VCOSS minimum property standards.

Baptcare is a customer focused, faith centred and purpose driven organisation working across Victoria and Tasmania, providing residential and community care for older people and support to children, families, and people with disability, financially disadvantaged people and people seeking asylum.

MISSION

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