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Via email: tasmanianhousingstrategy@communities.tas.gov.au

Mental Health Council of Tasmania (MHCT) Response to the draft Tasmanian Housing Strategy

MHCT welcomes the opportunity to provide a response to the draft Tasmanian Housing Strategy. MHCT is the peak body representing the mental health and wellbeing needs of all Tasmanians, and the community organisations that work with and support them. We work closely with government to amplify the voices of our members and Tasmanian communities.

MHCT has prepared a response to Homes Tasmania's consultation questions below. Our response focuses on ensuring that Tasmanians with lived and living experience of mental ill-health and their loved ones have access to safe, secure and affordable housing. MHCT's previous response to the Tasmanian Housing Strategy discussion paper highlighted the need for people with mental ill-health to be adequately reflected in the strategy.¹ With the latest National Study of Mental Health and Wellbeing identifying that two in five Australians have experienced a mental disorder in their lifetime, it is critical that consideration to the housing needs of Tasmanians living with mental ill-health are considered in the final strategy.² This must include, but not be limited to, a focus on the expansion of the following programs:

- The roll-out of a permanent Housing and Accommodation Support Initiative (HASI) across the state to support people in private and social housing rentals.
- Delivery of the Rapid Rehousing program in additional locations across the state and lengthening duration of stay to two years, or preferably for as long as needed.

Question 1: 'Our way forward' identifies several levers for achieving a more equitable housing system for all Tasmanians. Are there additional or alternative more important levers that you believe should be addressed?

MHCT welcomes the adoption of key levers such as housing in all policies, a housing-first response, and reducing rental vulnerability. MHCT suggests that another lever is added to ensure that people with lived and living experience of housing stress and homelessness (including people with mental ill-health) are meaningfully involved in the design of policy, programs, services and continuous monitoring and improvement of the strategy's implementation. Inclusion of such a lever will be critical to ensure that the strategy responds to the expressed needs of Tasmanians including those with mental ill-health and carers supporting people with mental ill-health.^{3 4}

Question 2: Theme one identifies the need for 'more homes, built faster'. Are there additional or alternative objectives you recommend for consideration?

MHCT suggests that objective five includes coordination with community sector organisations, lived experience representative organisations, and housing and homelessness services to ensure that priorities, planning and delivery is coordinated with vulnerable cohorts (including people with mental ill-health and carers supporting people with mental ill-health) in mind.

MHCT welcomes objective seven and acknowledges the importance of high-quality housing in supporting mental wellbeing. However, MHCT recommends that the objective not only fosters a culture of high quality, energy efficient and fit-for-purpose housing, but ensures that suitable mechanisms and resourcing is in place so that such housing is built and/or upgraded and maintained.

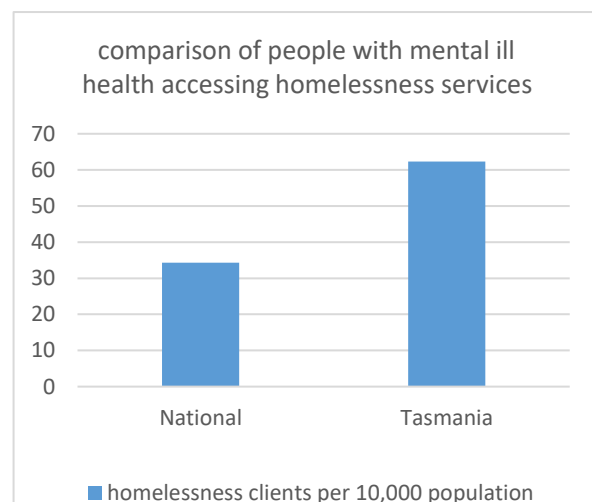
Question 3: Theme two centres on ‘affordability in the private market’. Are there additional or alternative objectives you recommend for consideration?

MHCT recommends objective two is expanded to include additional services and supports for people to maintain tenancy of their private rental. Programs such as HASI could be expanded to include support for people with mental ill-health to maintain their private rental, particularly when further support is required due to the episodic nature of their mental illness. This may include options for temporary rent relief when a person is admitted to hospital or under involuntary admission. The Productivity Commission’s 2020 inquiry into Mental Health highlights that, *‘supported housing in private rentals can provide significant benefits... It can provide an alternative to social housing, freeing up social housing places. Supported housing can (also) help to overcome many of the barriers people with mental illness may face in accessing the private rental market’*.⁵ MHCT suggests that the strategy includes consideration to the implementation of HASI-like models within the private rental market.

Additionally, MHCT supports objective five, however, the objective should be expanded to particularly consider vulnerable cohorts (including people with mental ill-health) to access and maintain tenancy in a private rental market.⁶ The Productivity Commission identified that *‘people with mental illness often face discrimination in the private rental market as many consider they are relatively difficult tenants and/or have reduced income stability’*. The Productivity Commission suggested reviewing tenancy legislation reforms in NSW and Victoria. MHCT supports that such a review is undertaken to inform tenancy legislation reform in Tasmania with a focus on improving access into the private rental market and maintaining tenancy for people with mental ill-health.⁷

Question 4: Theme three places ‘people at the centre’ of the draft Strategy. Are there additional or alternative objectives you recommend for consideration?

MHCT recommends that people experiencing mental ill-health are included in the strategy under ‘supporting those in need’ and in subsequent objectives related to the theme of ‘people at the centre’. Tasmania has a significantly high proportion of people experiencing mental ill-health who are accessing homelessness services (62.3 clients per 10,000 people) in comparison to the national average (34.3 clients per 10,000 people).⁸ It is clear that people experiencing mental ill-health in Tasmania are in particular need of support, ensuring that their needs are prioritised alongside other vulnerable cohorts is essential to guaranteeing the strategy’s vision is adequately executed.



MHCT also recommends that objective two includes the expansion of housing and homelessness services that meet the needs of vulnerable cohorts. This includes the expansion of the Rapid Rehousing program for

people exiting inpatient hospital care and the HASI program to support more with mental ill-health to maintain their social and community housing tenancy across the state.

Additionally, MHCT recommends that objective four incorporates both the meaningful inclusion of people with lived experience in the development of housing policy, and ensures that services and systems are designed with trauma-informed principles in place.

Question 5: Theme four highlights ‘local prosperity’ as a priority. Are there additional or alternative objectives you recommend for consideration?

MHCT welcomes objective one, however, recommends that the objective be expanded from private industry to include public and community sectors. MHCT’s Impacts on the Community Mental Health Workforce Report,⁹ alongside MHCT’s response to the Our Healthcare Futures consultation,¹⁰ highlights the necessity of ensuring suitable and affordable housing for mental health sector workers based in rural and remote areas of the state. Their work is critical to ensuring that people have access to appropriate mental healthcare to meet their needs in the communities in which they live. A recent survey of MHCT members highlighted the difficulties in recruiting to rural and remote areas due to a lack of affordable housing. In addition, the mental health sector more broadly is experiencing substantial reform that includes recruitment of a significant number of mental health staff. This necessitates close collaboration between Housing Tasmania, the Tasmanian Department of Health, and Primary Health Tasmania, to ensure that housing is available to meet the workforce needs of the sector.

Question 6: Are there other ways the government could make its actions and progress to meet the proposed objectives more transparent and accessible?

MHCT recommends that a focus must be placed on monitoring and continuous improvement to meet identified objectives and outcomes. This should go beyond calculating housing stock and monetary spending and include improved reporting processes, access to up-to-date data and the establishment of a social impact framework that determines outcome indicators and success measures.

For further discussion on any aspects of this response, please contact MHCT.

Yours sincerely,



Connie Digolis

CEO

Mental Health Council of Tasmania

References

- ¹ MHCT (2022) Response to the Tasmanian Housing Strategy discussion paper <https://mhct.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/10/SUB-MHCT-Tasmanian-Housing-Strategy-Oct2022.pdf>
- ² ABS (2022) National Study of Mental Health and Wellbeing <https://www.abs.gov.au/statistics/health/mental-health/national-study-mental-health-and-wellbeing/latest-release#key-statistics>
- ³ Tasmanian Government (2022) Lived Experience Summary report https://tashousingstrategy.homest Tasmania.com.au/download_file/view/211/552
- ⁴ MHCT (2022) Response to the Tasmanian Housing Strategy discussion paper <https://mhct.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/10/SUB-MHCT-Tasmanian-Housing-Strategy-Oct2022.pdf>
- ⁵ Productivity Commission (2020) Mental Health Inquiry report <https://www.pc.gov.au/inquiries/completed/mental-health/report>
- ⁶ Tasmanian Government (2022) Lived Experience Summary report https://tashousingstrategy.homest Tasmania.com.au/download_file/view/211/552
- ⁷ Productivity Commission (2020) Mental Health Inquiry report <https://www.pc.gov.au/inquiries/completed/mental-health/report>
- ⁸ Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (2021) Specialist homelessness services 2020–21: Tasmania https://www.aihw.gov.au/getmedia/c6e374d2-f9b6-4c69-a491-2a9e9857b441/TAS_factsheet.pdf.aspx
- ⁹ MHCT (2021) COVID-19 Impacts on the Community Mental Health Workforce <https://mhct.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/11/MHCT-COVID-Workforce-Report-Nov21.pdf>
- ¹⁰ MHCT (2021) Improving mental healthcare in Tasmanian communities <https://mhct.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/MHCT-reponse-to-Our-Healthcare-Future-Consultation-12022021.pdf>