



## **NT Community Housing Growth Strategy 2021-2030**

**14 May 2021**

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## Statement of Recognition

The Salvation Army acknowledges the Traditional Owners of the lands on which we live and work.

We pay our respect to Elders and acknowledge their continuing relationship to this land and the ongoing living cultures of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples across Australia. We also acknowledge future aspirations of all First Nations peoples.

Through respectful relationships we will work for the mutual flourishing of Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians.

We commit ourselves in prayer and practice to this land of Australia and its people, seeking reconciliation, unity and equity.



## Introduction

The Salvation Army thanks the Northern Territory Government for the opportunity to share our feedback and service delivery experience through contributing to this consultation to inform the establishment of the NT Community Housing Growth Strategy 2021-2030 (the Strategy). This response brings together the experience of our highly qualified and accomplished housing, homelessness and family and domestic violence staff and managers, and is informed by the voice of the people who use our services.

Fundamental to the ethos of The Salvation Army is the idea that every human being has inherent worth and every person should live with dignity. The Salvation Army envisions an Australia where all people have adequate and stable incomes, can afford and sustain housing, and are healthy and connected to community.

In framing our input, The Salvation Army acknowledges the unique and complex factors that contextualise the development and delivery of housing and other services in the Northern Territory – specifically; its demographic profile, geographic size, remoteness, and the critical historic and cultural realities experienced by Indigenous individuals and communities living in the Northern Territory.

Importantly, we also acknowledge the other significant and concurrent housing and homelessness policy and program initiatives being rolled out in the Northern Territory, which together, have the potential to make significant inroads into rising Indigenous and mainstream homelessness rates and the increasing shortfalls in social and affordable housing. These include the Our Community: Our Future: Our Homes; remote housing investment package, the Town Camps Reform Framework, the NT Housing Strategy 2020-25 and the establishment of Aboriginal Housing NT.

The Salvation Army welcomes efforts by the Northern Territory Government to grow community housing via additional income streams, tax benefits and exemptions, subsidies, access to targeted financing vehicles and other service delivery and social outcomes, as an important component of the overall housing and homelessness response.

However, despite its promise and in considering the experience of other states and territories, it is clear that the growth of community housing will require much more than title or management transfers and access to national revenue streams to affect meaningful change in the quantum of social housing in the short to medium term. Substantial direct government investment (such as the \$5.3 billion committed by Victoria), access to land, changes to local planning laws, inclusionary zoning and the development of partnerships across government, business and communities must all be assessed and measured for their role in ensuring access to appropriate, affordable housing. This is a critical human rights issue for all Australians.

This submission is in five parts:

- **Growth** – highlights some of the objectives, principles and actions required to enable and deliver growth in community housing in the Northern Territory.
- **People at the centre** – states that housing must be designed and delivered in a way that is responsive to the needs of different people.
- **Pathways** – identifies actions that will enable people to access community housing, sustain their tenancies and move between different options based on their particular needs.
- **Industry development** – identifies capability gaps across the system that also need to be considered to enable the growth of the sector in the NT.
- **Implementation** – highlights issues that need to be considered in the planning and implementation of the NT Community Housing Growth Strategy.

## Salvation Army Housing

Salvation Army Housing (SAH) is a National Community Housing Provider registered under the National Regulatory System, existing to deliver its parent organisation's mission. It provides homes for individuals and families who are homeless or at risk of homelessness, people on low incomes and people with specific support needs.

As a not-for-profit organisation, a registered charity and a public company limited by guarantee, SAH is established under the auspices of The Salvation Army to address the needs and housing requirements of people at all stages of life. This includes early intervention to avoid a slide into homelessness, emergency accommodation and crisis responses, transition to more stable accommodation and supporting a move to independence.

Following the merging of the two former Salvation Army administrative territories into a single, unified Australia Territory on 1 December 2018, SAH expressions operating in each of the states and territories were brought together to act collaboratively as a national organisation headquartered in Melbourne. As a national community housing provider, SAH currently operates the following properties across Australia, managing over 1,851 tenancies every year:

- Transitional housing – 649 properties (684 tenancies)
- Crisis Accommodation – 157 properties (161 tenancies)
- Long Term Housing – 908 properties (1,006 tenancies)

SAH is currently working with TSA homelessness services to separate case and tenancy management for those currently housed in Northern Territory homelessness programs. This project was established to deliver improved and sustainable outcomes for those most disadvantaged as they move within the housing continuum.

SAH's vision for Northern Territory is to successfully deliver integrated service models and sustain successful tenancy outcomes in the context of local needs. We work closely with other TSA stakeholders and external parties (community, governments, other providers) to grow SAH, deliver fit-for-purpose housing and support tenant outcomes. SAH prioritises effective working relationships with local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations in seeking to respond appropriately to cultural needs and the challenges faced by community housing providers throughout the Northern Territory.

## Growth

For many people who come to The Salvation Army for support, social housing plays a critical role in an increasingly unaffordable and insecure housing market. We also know that access to social housing is the only sustainable housing outcome for the people we serve. It is also the most effective exit point for many people experiencing homelessness as it offers vital support to other vulnerable groups, such as women and children escaping violence and young people experiencing disadvantage. The continuous undersupply of available social housing has meant that individuals, particularly disadvantaged and vulnerable cohorts, are having significant difficulty accessing much needed housing and comprehensive support.

The social housing deficit has also led to a chronic shortage of available transitional housing options and crisis accommodation centres across the Territory. It has been noted that as a result of the low vacancy rate in the social housing system, the number of clients transitioning from these short-term temporary accommodation options into long-term accommodation (public and community housing) has stagnated. This housing bottleneck combined with the increasing demand for these 'transitional' services has been highlighted by our service streams as one of the most urgent issues that the Northern Territory Government should address.

Therefore, we recommend that increasing social housing stock (public, community and Indigenous housing), both in the short and long term, must be one of the priorities of the Northern Territory Housing Strategy going forward, in addition to any investment in renewal, refurbishment and significant upgrades of existing stock.

While The Salvation Army believes that long-term housing with accompanying support, such as Housing First approaches, should underpin the homelessness response and social housing allocation policy across Australia, we understand that this requires a supply of social housing that is sufficient to meet demand. Despite the intent of the Community Housing Growth Strategy to increase the overall quantum of social housing, neither the immediate nor foreseeable community housing supply arising from this will meet demand for many years, if at all.

Similarly, it will likely take many years and rolling budget commitments before there is adequate flow within the social housing system and capacity to deliver long-term housing models at scale. Therefore, in the shorter term, we consider that an increase in the stock of transitional housing and crisis accommodation centres is also necessary – particularly in regions where there are limited or no such crisis options. This will contribute towards the purpose of supporting more people until they can exit into long-term and stable housing. In the case of our family and domestic violence services, transitional housing has proven to be effective in helping women whose situations involve child protection, in addition to short-term housing stability, because there is a continuity in case management, care and placement.

New social housing units in the Northern Territory need to be well-located (near transport, jobs and services), safe and healthy (dwellings must be quality built, energy efficient, and universally accessible) and focused on meeting priority and under-served cohorts and their needs, such

as single people, individuals and families from Indigenous backgrounds, large family units, people with disabilities, people with pets and older women.

### **Carers of dependents with a disability – Linda's\* story**

Linda\* is a 43-year-old Aboriginal woman with a 21-year-old son with severe autism for whom she is the sole primary full-time caregiver. She had been a victim of family violence for many years and in 2020 made the brave decision to leave the abusive relationship with her son. Linda reached out to the family violence intake service and it was quickly established that she was not eligible for refuge accommodation due to her care commitments. Her son's gender, age and disability were all contributing factors in the decision. The only support that she could access was temporary motel accommodation.

Linda ended up having to 'couch surf' with some friends and got in contact with the Aboriginal Women's Legal Service until she was in a position to return to her home with her son. This process took some months to achieve and was disruptive to his education and support activities.

During this time, her son experienced serious anxiety arising from his dislocation from his familiar home environment, which is essential for his sense of safety and stability. Consequently, his anxiety saw an increase in unsettled and distressed behaviour and at times, physical and emotional outbursts.

Linda has stated that it was not just about her son not being in his own home, but the impact of multiple moves due to a lack of safe and stable accommodation during this period. She said that she was shocked and dismayed that her care responsibilities meant she was unable to access the specialist crisis family violence services that she needed during a critical time of leaving violence. She said there were no facilities or accommodation resources available to meet her needs and the special needs of her son.

Linda was offered and provided with family violence case management, which she found helpful when eventually able to return to her home with her son.

*\*Name changed*



As part of the objective of growing community housing stock in the Northern Territory, The Salvation Army proposes the following suggestions for consideration by the Northern Territory Government's as part of strategy development:

- **Ensure an ongoing funding program for community housing** so providers can have 'shovel-ready' projects to apply for available funds. The ad-hoc nature of current funding and the fact that other sources of revenue (for example, rental assistance, rental payments) are capped means that the sector cannot develop the capacity and capability required to continue growing. There needs to be more certainty when future funding rounds will be offered.
- **Ensure a simplified application process and extend timelines** where the capacity for responding to new funding opportunities may be limited.
- **Review how rental payments are collected** through social and affordable housing to make it sustainable for providers to build and maintain housing, while also increasing their stock. In particular, issues of remoteness, distance, cultural specificity and the cost of partnerships need to be considered.
- **Introduce mandatory inclusionary zoning**, which would see developers compelled to include social and/or affordable housing in their projects. This should include a transparency and accountability framework that defines how social and affordable housing will be apportioned in new developments. There are currently no mechanisms in place to engage with developers to make sure a portion of their development is affordable.
- **Provide discounted rates to incentivise not-for-profit organisations to invest in housing**, where low rental returns, building and maintenance costs, rates and taxes can be prohibitive.
- **Provide better access to information about the availability of land** and whether infrastructure developments are already in place or proposed for the future.
- **Enhance the concept of 'barnacle-ing'**, where existing properties have space in the surrounding land, the building is designed with the ability to attach pieces to the existing structure as families expand. The Northern Territory Government already invests in the 'Room to Breathe' program which uses this concept. The habitable square footage can sometimes be increased by a considerable percentage.

Our staff also highlighted the need to improve the identification of clients or cohorts in need through sector data and information held by the Northern Territory Government in a transparent manner. This will enable community housing providers to plan and deliver services more strategically and in line with identified needs (for example, number of bedrooms, single occupant or families, type of dwelling based on mobility, and type of dwelling based on program requirements). Currently, data for client cohorts is fragmented between sectors, not necessarily in alignment nor easily available.

It is also important to ensure that housing is environmentally sustainable and energy efficient. In 2017-18, a five-year analysis of more than 12,000 people who accessed The Salvation Army's Moneycare financial counselling services showed that one in six people experienced energy stress. An energy efficient home not only reduces the cost of heating and cooling but can also have significant benefits for physical and mental health.

The Salvation Army believes that the Northern Territory Government can supply land on a temporary basis for crisis and short-term accommodation, such as in transport corridors which are not slated for development for several years. Greater access to information about available land and planning timeframes would assist organisations that do have the means to provide temporary housing structures to set up emergency accommodation and allow for people to remain in their communities while they reconstruct. This could include modular 'prefab' homes and other temporary housing designs.

A searchable register of local and state government land suitable for short to medium-term housing would allow for a swifter and more efficient establishment of temporary housing in communities and ensure that recovery is less disruptive for families and the community.

Finally, it is proposed that the government works with the sector to determine a clear role for the community housing sector in the provision of affordable housing. We consider that further policy work is required to articulate the role state government and the community housing sector should have in affordable housing, both in terms of rental and ownership.

## Recommendations

- The Northern Territory Government commits to increase social housing stock (public, community and Indigenous housing), both in the short and long term, in addition to any investment in renewal, refurbishment and significant upgrades of existing stock.
- The Northern Territory Government commits to an ongoing funding program for community housing to provide certainty for housing providers.
- The Strategy seeks to address the bottlenecks in transitional housing due to the lack of exit points, including into social housing.
- The Northern Territory Government undertakes a review of rental collection in community housing.
- The Northern Territory Government introduces mandatory inclusionary zoning, including transparency and accountability frameworks for developers and housing providers.
- The Northern Territory Government provides not-for-profit organisations with discounted rates to incentivise investment in housing, where low rental returns, maintenance costs, rates and taxes can be prohibitive.
- The Northern Territory Government provides better access to information about the availability of land.
- The Northern Territory Government expands programs like 'Room to Breathe' to maximise the available habitable space.
- The Northern Territory Government provides adequate funding for community housing providers to develop housing in remote and regional communities.
- The Northern Territory Government provides transparent, accessible data to allow community housing providers to meet identified needs.
- The Northern Territory Government makes available a searchable register of local and territory land suitable for short to medium-term housing.
- The Northern Territory Government works with the community housing sector to define clear roles in the provision of affordable housing.
- The Northern Territory Government ensures that future housing includes energy efficiency and sustainability measures that enhance the financial and other wellbeing outcomes for tenants.

## People at the centre

The Salvation Army shares the Northern Territory Government's vision that social and affordable housing must be designed and delivered in a way that is responsive to the needs of different people. This vision must be reflected in the Strategy.

### Cohorts

Access to appropriate, affordable and secure housing is the foundation of any family or individual's engagement in work, education and community. The Salvation Army considers that there is a need for an integrated and holistic approach when developing social policy. Such an approach should aim to improve housing and quality of life in general, given the mix of service provision requirements for people with different needs. Therefore, the development of a community housing growth strategy should provide critical consideration of different cohorts impacted by housing unaffordability and homelessness, and their varying support needs.

As highlighted throughout this submission, the lack of affordable housing and support options remains the single most critical factor leading to homelessness and social disengagement for individuals and communities. Our evidence reaffirms that, for the following cohorts, affordable and suitable housing is urgently required, in concert with tailored and flexible support that meets their individual needs:

- People who are sleeping rough
- Women aged over 55
- Women and children impacted by family and domestic violence
- People exiting institutions (young people leaving state care, people exiting prison, and people exiting hospitals)
- People seeking asylum
- People of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander descent
- Veterans
- Women with children coming out of divorce
- Mothers and/or fathers who have lost employment
- Survivors of modern slavery
- Individuals with disability
- Individuals with mental health concerns (including substance use disorders)
- Young people
- Men with primary care responsibilities for children



Features of affordable housing are not restricted to providing a range of housing types, tenure options or locations. One size does not fit all. Therefore, The Salvation Army believes that the Strategy must include critical consideration of the different cohorts impacted by housing affordability and homelessness and their varying support needs (for example, youth operate well in shared accommodation, but older single women need independent living).

For each of the different cohorts, not only is appropriate housing required, but the provision of tailored and flexible support that meets the needs of the individual for the duration of need is essential. This means that the Strategy must reflect the voice of those living the experience of homelessness or in the fragile situation of crisis or transitional housing. These cohorts are best suited to articulate the type of housing and support that needs to be provided in the Northern Territory.

Through our work with our clients, we identify deep and complex intersections of different risk factors and vulnerabilities within different cohorts, while recognising that personal, social, structural and economic factors often overlap and interact with each other. For all these cohorts, a range of co-occurring presenting issues are increasing, both in terms of prevalence and complexity.

In the case of women escaping from family violence, our staff indicate that victim-survivors who do not have a permanent residency or citizenship are particularly vulnerable. As they have no source of income, it is very difficult for them to move out of transitional accommodation. In many cases, victim-survivors end up returning to the perpetrator. For other women, the different systems that are intended to support them can fail when they do not consider their individual circumstances.

Similarly, The Salvation Army has growing concerns about increasing homelessness and housing unaffordability among women aged over 55. Our staff estimate that there will be unprecedented increasing demand for our services from women belonging to this cohort, who have either left family violence or do not have secure housing, and do not have an established career or stable source of income for a variety of reasons. We know that this cohort makes up a large proportion of people in insecure housing (primarily couch surfing and living in caravans) but are often invisible to support services as they do not seek support as readily as rough sleepers.

### **Emma's Story\***

Emma\* entered a Salvation Army service after spending several months living rough. She was a victim-survivor of domestic violence who escaped with her only friend, her dog Tasha\*. During the time Emma was living rough Tasha continued by her side day and night. Tasha not only acted in the capacity of friend and confidante but as protector and guard at night.

When Emma first entered the service we were not able to immediately find appropriate accommodation but arranged for Tasha to stay with the RSPCA's boarding program temporarily while Emma stayed with our service. This created a huge amount of stress and anxiety for Emma. So much so that she chose to leave the service in the middle of the night to sleep outside the RSPCA and then return in the morning.

As soon as possible we were able to negotiate with a community housing provider to provide accommodation for both Emma and Tasha but the stress and anxiety of the separation would not have been necessary if there had been sufficient appropriate housing options available at the time.

*\*Name changed*

## The Salvation Army's Homelessness Services – The Northern Territory

The Salvation Army Northern Territory Homelessness Stream offers a bold and courageous vision to end homelessness for the people we serve.

To support this vision, The Salvation Army Northern Territory Homelessness Stream has developed a three-year Agenda (2021-2024) that outlines the key priorities and directions, inclusive of better understand the experience of homelessness for Indigenous peoples and communities, increasing the supply of social and affordable housing, with accompanying support, fit for purpose property responses and leading a Northern Territory workforce development strategy.

The Salvation Army Northern Territory Homelessness Stream supports individuals and families at risk of or experiencing homelessness along the continuum of care from Assertive Outreach service, short and medium term supported accommodation, through to case and tenancy management services for individuals in public housing.

The Salvation Army Northern Territory Homelessness Stream currently offers:

Darwin:

- **The Street to Home Program** offers assertive outreach to individuals experiencing street/rough sleeping.
- **Towards Independence Top End** provides case management and tenancy management services to families at risk of or experiencing homelessness.
- **House 49** supports single men and couples without children through short to medium term supported accommodation and case management services.
- **Sunrise Centre** offers supported short and medium accommodation for single men and women at risk of or experiencing homelessness (30 beds).

Alice Springs:

- **Towards Independence Alice Springs** provides case management and tenancy management services to families at risk of or experiencing homelessness.
- **Red Shield Men's Hostel** supports single men through short to medium term supported accommodation and case management services.

## Housing, homelessness and the intersection with complex needs

Although there is no single root cause that leads to a person becoming homeless, the existence of strong links between homelessness, other social vulnerability factors and structural causes have been well established. Our staff have also highlighted several other factors impacting people experiencing homelessness that arise as a direct result of government policy, or that require changes in government policy, funding and practice for improved outcomes.

In our view, it is critical that any policy response is informed by a thorough and sensitive consideration of how people with multiple or complex needs would interact with the system. This involves recognising that people are complex beings and possess multiple and often interconnected characteristics. This also means that people can (and often do) belong to more than one client cohort group.

Some of the elements that need to be considered in developing housing policy and practice are:

- Trauma – traumatic events often occur as a precursor to becoming homeless, with many people leaving home to avoid ongoing trauma in the form of assault, child abuse and other forms of interpersonal violence. Service systems are not always equipped with the necessary tools or the right responses to help people who have a history of trauma. Often this lack of understanding of the impact of trauma can prevent homelessness services from being effective.<sup>1</sup>
- Alcohol and other drug-related (AOD) issues – there is a strong association between problematic alcohol or other drug use and experiences of homelessness.<sup>2</sup> Research from homelessness services in Melbourne shows that 43 per cent of the homeless population reported that they had alcohol and other drug use problems. Of these, one-third reported that they had these problems prior to becoming homeless, with the remaining two-thirds reporting that they had developed them following homelessness.<sup>3</sup> The Salvation Army Sunrise Centre in Darwin seeks to address comorbid homelessness and AOD issues through the co-location of AOD and homelessness services.
- Deinstitutionalisation – the deinstitutionalisation policies of the 1980's were predicated on the assumption that people with psychosocial disability living in the community would have adequate access to social housing, employment, income, clinical services and psychosocial support. As stated in the Productivity Commission's October 2019 *Mental Health Draft Report Volume 1*, many people became homeless or vulnerable to living in unsuitable housing situations as a result of deinstitutionalisation.<sup>4</sup> Sadly, the experience of mental illness and related disability today is frequently a fast track to deep and

<sup>1</sup> European Federation of National Organisations Working with the Homeless, *Recognising the link between trauma and homelessness* (2017)

<sup>2</sup> Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, *Alcohol, tobacco & other drugs in Australia* (2019)

<sup>3</sup> Ibid

<sup>4</sup> Productivity Commission, *Mental Health, Draft Report*, (2019)





permanent poverty. Living with psychosocial disability too often means reduced access to employment, and income at poverty levels. Consequently, many people living with psychosocial disability cycle in and out of homelessness.<sup>5</sup>

- Mental ill-health – suitable housing (housing that is secure, affordable, of reasonable quality and of enduring tenure) is particularly important in preventing mental ill-health and is a first step in promoting long-term recovery for people experiencing mental illness.<sup>6</sup> Unfortunately, around 16 per cent of people with mental illness live in unsuitable accommodation (for example, homelessness, at risk of eviction, in overcrowded housing or housing of substandard quality).<sup>7</sup> Research shows that people living with mental health issues are more likely to experience homelessness and that people with severe mental illness are more likely to experience higher housing stress and live in unstable housing compared to all people with a mental health issue.<sup>8</sup>

It is also noteworthy that the intersection of these very issues (trauma, mental health, and AOD) have been highlighted in developing holistic approaches to address the needs of many Aboriginal people experiencing homelessness and have informed the development of a number of outreach services at Larrakia Nation Aboriginal Corporation and other Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander services in the Northern Territory. This is significant because Indigenous people are overrepresented in the homelessness sector and face systemic cultural barriers that contribute to this.

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<sup>5</sup> Smith, J., *Introduction: Mental Health, Disability and Homelessness* (2018)

<sup>6</sup> Productivity Commission, *Mental Health, Draft Report* (2019).

<sup>7</sup> Ibid

<sup>8</sup> Smith, J., *Introduction: Mental Health, Disability and Homelessness* (2018); Kubanek, C., *Specialist homelessness services clients with mental health issues* (2018). Article in Parity, available at <[www.search.informit.org/doi/10.3316/informit.000210667500427](http://www.search.informit.org/doi/10.3316/informit.000210667500427)>, viewed 7 April 2021



## Recommendations

- The Northern Territory Government critically considers different cohorts impacted by housing unaffordability and homelessness, and their varying support needs in the development of housing policy.
- The Northern Territory Government equips housing and support services with tools and resources to recognise and effectively respond to the deep and complex individual risk factors experienced among different client cohorts.
- The Northern Territory Government ensures people experiencing family and domestic violence without permanent residency or citizenship (particularly those without work rights) can access housing and other services until their visa status is resolved.
- The Northern Territory Government acknowledges and plans for a continued unprecedented and increasing demand for housing and support services by women over 55.
- The Northern Territory Government ensures social and affordable housing is built, located, and makes adequate policy provision for pets.
- The Strategy recognises the intersection with multiple and complex needs, including needs arising from past trauma, alcohol and other drug-related issues, deinstitutionalisation and mental health.
- The Strategy acknowledges and addresses systemic cultural barriers that contribute to homelessness amongst Indigenous communities.

## **The Salvation Army's Family and Domestic Violence (FDV) Services - The Northern Territory**

Catherine Booth House (CBH) is a service delivered by The Salvation Army Northern Territory Region and has been successfully providing safe accommodation and support for 12 women onsite in Darwin for almost 40 years (the total number of single en-suite rooms in this facility is 12). To date, CBH has provided a niche family violence service specifically to women at risk of or experiencing family violence. The service provides an outreach arm to women and children staying in their homes or being supported in alternative accommodation such as hostels, hotels, caravan parks or with relatives. The outreach team also provide counselling for women onsite.

### Increasing The Salvation Army's footprint

The Salvation Army proposes to increase its footprint within the family violence space in Darwin (Palmerston) by purpose-building a new therapeutic Women and Children's facility comprising 10 independent one and two-bedroom self-contained units and three 3-bedroom outreach houses for larger families.

The 10 independent units will provide a trauma informed 24-hour service (including taking referrals after hours) with semi-independent crisis accommodation for up to 34 women and children receiving support from well-being officers and case workers.

The transitional housing will provide longer term accommodation for up to 15 women and children (this includes larger families) exiting the supported crisis accommodation and other government and non-government organisation services. It will enable a transition period for the women to establish independence, seek trauma recovery support, gain access to training, parenting support and employment opportunities and provide a therapeutic supportive environment for their children. TSA have confidence that the proposed integrated housing model will better assist women and their children to regain independence and dignity in their lives and effect real long-term change.

The total expected increase of beds for women and children experiencing FDV is 49. However, we are working with the Northern Territory Government to keep our current site in Darwin and expand on the new site in Palmerston which would mean an increase in beds to 61 in total.

## Pathways

### Community housing - Prevention and early intervention

Prevention and early intervention are perhaps the most important areas of focus in our goal to divert people from the service system, address homelessness and to maintain tenancies once people are housed. These services and initiatives are effective in arresting homelessness before it becomes entrenched and ensures better long-term outcomes for those using our services.

Research from the Australian Housing and Urban Research Institute (AHURI) has found that many early intervention strategies can be implemented quickly and cost-effectively by stabilising people in their existing tenancy and avoiding evictions. There is considerable scope to increase and improve early intervention to provide more secure housing, and to achieve better mental health outcomes for people at risk of homelessness.<sup>9</sup>

There is also abundant evidence that getting people into housing as quickly as possible is an effective measure to address homelessness while also preventing the myriad of problems associated with being homeless from escalating. This is why The Salvation Army strongly endorses these rapid re-housing approaches, which are premised on the 'Housing First' philosophy. Once people are in secure housing, they can start addressing the issues that have contributed to their homelessness.<sup>10</sup>

### Support

Alongside the availability of appropriate affordable housing itself and effective prevention and early intervention initiatives to 'turn off the tap', the provision of support services, which are separate from tenancy services, represents a further priority in effectively responding to homelessness, helping people maintain tenancies once housed and providing opportunities for people to thrive. While the types of support may be diverse, Salvation Army frontline staff maintain the importance of a number of characteristics in any form of support.

These include that support should be:

- Tailored to the individual needs of the individual
- Flexible, in acknowledgement of varying complexity
- Client-centred

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<sup>9</sup> Australian Housing and Urban Research Institute, *Housing, homelessness and mental health: towards systems change* (2018)

<sup>10</sup> Council to Homeless Persons, *Early intervention the key to ending homelessness* (2014)

- Available for the duration of need (and not the convenience of data collection and funding arrangements).

In particular, staff stressed that a three-month support duration is often insufficient to address clients' housing issues, particularly if these are complex and occurring within the context of an increasingly constrained and unaffordable housing market. Support periods should be responsive to current and emerging trends rather than being limited by the circumstances that informed the historical 13-week support duration. Greater flexibility of support would lead to improved housing outcomes. Increased flexibility that is informed by individual need would also ensure a person-centred approach to service delivery and ensure less people are excluded because they fall outside program guidelines.

### Transitional housing

Transitional housing was originally intended as a supported short-term accommodation program that acts as a stepping stone to more permanent housing in public housing, community housing or the private rental market. The Salvation Army has identified the following issues and concerns about its functionality:

- Transitional housing is rarely available due to high demand and competition between family violence and homelessness services for scarce properties.
- Intended as a short to medium-term accommodation option, transitional housing is part of the bottleneck between crisis responses and permanent housing. Our experience is that if a family manages to secure transitional housing, they are unable to transition on to permanent housing due to long social housing wait lists. It can often take up to two years to move from transitional housing to social housing.
- While the tenancy services and accommodation itself are appropriate, the transitional housing operating model was designed for adults and does not provide the support required for young people to achieve independence. Many young people need comprehensive support to change their life trajectory, including to address addictions, build relationships, and develop life skills.

*We need more transitional housing. There was a government initiative called 'A Place to Call Home' - this was a transitional house that eventually turned into that person's forever home and became public housing.*



*This program supported families with complex needs into long-term housing (with very positive outcomes). Instead of going to a refuge, families and individuals experiencing homelessness could move directly into this housing and receive tenancy and other support for the first 12 months. They did not have to leave the housing at the end of the support period. The housing was then transferred to the general public housing pool and their tenancy extended in accordance with normal tenancy arrangements for public housing.*

*The program was funded by the Commonwealth in 2014 and aimed to reduce the number of homeless people turned away from homeless shelters each year and lead to improved success in reintegrating people with the broader community. It also assisted in reducing the likelihood of their cycling in and out of homelessness services.”*

(Family and Domestic Violence Worker, The Salvation Army)

## Recommendations

- The Strategy prioritises early intervention and prevention initiatives.
- The Strategy commits to increase access to rapid re-housing approaches.
- The provision of appropriate support services for the duration of need is recognised as foundational for people to thrive and maintain their tenancies.
- The Strategy ensures the separation of tenancy and support services.
- The Strategy considers the critical role of transitional housing in responding to homelessness as part of community housing growth.

## Industry development

In considering issues concerning industry development in the Northern Territory within the context of growing community housing, The Salvation Army identified the following issues for consideration by the Northern Territory Government:

- Social and demographic context
- Role and value of partnerships
- Policy development to support community housing

### Social and demographic context

The Northern Territory is characterised by a unique and complex set of factors that need to be considered in the development and delivery of housing and other services.

The Northern Territory comprises the following demographic characteristics:

- just one per cent of the Australian population
- the majority (60 per cent) residing in the greater Darwin area and the remainder dispersed over remote and very remote areas
- a young age profile,<sup>11</sup> with a median age of 33.6 years compared with 37.8 years nationally
- males outnumber females 105.4 to 100, compared with 98.3 males for every 100 females nationally
- the Aboriginal population is estimated at 74,546, which represents about 30 per cent of the Territory's population, many of whom reside in remote and very remote areas
- there is virtually no population growth<sup>12</sup>

Together with its geographic size and the cost and access issues associated with the remoteness of very many communities, these demographic characteristics (both individually and collectively), should inform a community housing model that best fits the Northern Territory context.

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<sup>11</sup> It is estimated that 48 per cent of the homelessness population in the Territory is young people.

<sup>12</sup> Department of Treasury and Finance, Northern Territory Government, *Northern Territory Economy*  
<https://nteconomy.nt.gov.au/population>



## Role and value of partnerships

There is a wealth of experience and expertise already residing in the many and varied nongovernment organisations (NGOs), community housing providers and local Aboriginal organisations across the Northern Territory, which may be harnessed through partnerships and collaboration - both amongst each other and with the Northern Territory Government. As these organisations are spread across the Territory and represent a multitude of interests and population groups, the opportunities to learn and grow from their experience and expertise is enormous.

As a long-standing partner with many governments, businesses and other NGOs in advancing numerous social ventures (including community housing and support services), The Salvation Army encourages the Northern Territory Government to develop and foster strategic partnerships and alliances among the many stakeholders with an interest in housing and the provision of support services.

While effective partnerships have the potential to multiply the benefit well beyond that of the individual actors working alone, our own experience (and that of many others in the community sector) strongly endorses the notion that partnerships formation and maintenance does not come without a price tag. While informed by goodwill and shared vision, the imposts of time, travel and the sharing of resources will incur costs that are often well over and above those for which organisations may be funded to deliver.

## Policy development to support community housing

The effective and consistent provision of the range of deliverables and functions requires of a mature community housing sector is a complex undertaking. This is increasingly so when the sector is emerging, there are significant issues of remoteness and distance, and there is a breadth of service delivery and population group specificity amongst the many community organisations delivering relevant services across the Northern Territory.

In designing a community housing model for the Northern Territory, clear direction though the development of tailored community housing policy and the articulation of practices needed to best respond to the specific homelessness, risk of homelessness and housing needs of Territorians are required. These need to be informed through close consultation with relevant providers and the deliberate and comprehensive engagement of current and future tenants, as well as broader community engagement.



## Recommendations

- The development of the Northern Territory community housing model considers the unique social and demographic characteristics of the Territory's population.
- The Strategy recognises the enormous value of supporting the development of effective partnerships and collaboration with the diverse community organisations across the Northern Territory.
- That the Northern Territory Government acknowledges the additional financial costs for partnership formation and maintenance.
- The Strategy makes provision for the significant need to develop tailored community housing policy and practice guidance through close consultation with relevant service providers, current and future tenants.

## Implementation

### Performance measurement

In considering the notion that it is either common or expected that people would pass through social and affordable housing to the private market, a number of perspectives were provided from the different vantage points of Salvation Army homelessness and community housing stakeholders.

These perspectives should also be prefaced by acknowledging that by far the majority of our experience is in working with individuals and cohorts that are often the most vulnerable and disadvantaged.

From a community housing perspective, it was noted that:

- Salvation Army Housing clients in other states and territories do not tend to move on and housing is mainly required for life, for example for older women, people experiencing mental health issues etc.
- The private rental market is still too expensive even with some employment.
- Clients may wish to move between social housing properties, however the current system does not currently have the processes or capacity to facilitate this.

Our housing services have also highlighted that the Strategy should also enhance a better understanding of the social impact of the community housing sector. The current key performance measures (KPMs) only measure a provider's outputs regarding the physical property, which leads to a primary focus on business management rather than the wellbeing of clients.

We support the notion that measuring outcomes, rather than outputs, would help community housing organisations to make decisions about how to design and deliver services based on the needs and experiences of tenants.<sup>13</sup> Furthermore, a set of tenant wellbeing outcomes and measures would enable consistent and robust measurement and aggregation across the sector to support learning and advocacy.<sup>14</sup> For example, as a mission-driven organisation working towards transforming lives, The Salvation Army proposes that a more appropriate measure of success for social housing is not how many people exit, but how many people are equipped to live a more fulfilling life and the flourishing of communities. In particular, the expectation that people move on from social housing should be challenged, particularly when mainstream

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<sup>13</sup> Community Housing Industry Association Victoria, *Through Tenant Eyes: Measuring: The Social Impact of Community Housing – Sector Outcomes Framework* (2019)

<sup>14</sup> Ibid

housing remains unaffordable. A further measure of success could be a reduction in the need for support.

### Recommendations

- The Northern Territory Government acknowledges that it is often an unrealistic goal for people to move on from social housing to the critically unaffordable housing market. This is particularly true for people experiencing significant disadvantage or people with complex needs.
- The Strategy acknowledges that outcomes measurement would be a more effective means to measure the social impact of the sector. Alternative social housing outcome measures could include a reduction in the need for support or better quality of life.

## **The Salvation Army's Corps and Community Support Services**

The Salvation Army is a worldwide Christian church, where our faith convinces us that hope, purpose and fulfillment can be everyone's story. Whether seeking connection, guidance or a community of like-minded people, The Salvation Army welcomes people from all walks of life.

Our local churches offer a community presence around Australia. We provide a huge diversity of spiritual and social activities including the provision of emergency relief. We invite everyone to give us a call or drop in for a chat. In the Northern Territory, we offer corps (church) services in Alice Springs, Katherine, Palmerston and Darwin (Darwin City and Anula).

Several sites have recently undertaken extensive building renovations/rebuilds and there is extensive financial investment being made across our social service streams in the Northern Territory, to further add to the quality of our service provision. This means fit-for-purpose facilities that are both welcoming and culturally appropriate for the Territory. We are also seeking to extend our service reach into Tennant Creek once other projects are operating at their full potential.

### The Waterhole – Alice Springs

The Waterhole is The Salvation Army's open door to the community. Since opening in late 2012, The Salvation Army's 'The Waterhole' community centre in Alice Springs has been working hard to ensure it lives up to its name: that it is a place of tranquility, a place of meeting and a place of possibility.

The Waterhole welcomes people to use its facilities, to get out of the heat in summer or the cold in winter. Facilities include showers, washing machines and laundry powder, tea and coffee, kitchenette, television and DVD player to watch films, chairs and sofas. Art supplies and an art space are also very popular, together with the ability for clients to access external services such as Legal Aid that are co-located in our centres.

### The Hub- Katherine

The Hub, located in Katherine, is very similar to The Waterhole. It offers many of the same facilities, including a TV and DVD area, sofas, tea and coffee, art spaces and an activities area.

These services and centres are a vital element of The Salvation Army's strategy in the Northern Territory, providing spaces and meaningfully engaging with people at risk of or experiencing homelessness.

# Summary of recommendations

## Growth

### Recommendations

- The Northern Territory Government commits to increase social housing stock (public, community and Indigenous housing), both in the short and long term, in addition to any investment in renewal, refurbishment and significant upgrades of existing stock.
- The Northern Territory Government commits to an ongoing funding program for community housing to provide certainty for housing providers.
- The Strategy seeks to address the bottlenecks in transitional housing due to the lack of exit points, including into social housing.
- The Northern Territory Government undertakes a review of rental collection in community housing.
- The Northern Territory Government introduces mandatory inclusionary zoning, including transparency and accountability frameworks for developers and housing providers.
- The Northern Territory Government provides not-for-profit organisations with discounted rates to incentivise investment in housing, where low rental returns, maintenance costs, rates and taxes can be prohibitive.
- The Northern Territory Government provides better access to information about the availability of land.
- The Northern Territory Government expands programs like 'Room to Breathe' to maximise the available habitable space.
- The Northern Territory Government provides adequate funding for community housing providers to develop housing in remote and regional communities.
- The Northern Territory Government provides transparent, accessible data to allow community housing providers to meet identified needs.
- The Northern Territory Government makes available a searchable register of local and territory land suitable for short to medium-term housing.
- The Northern Territory Government works with the community housing sector to define clear roles in the provision of affordable housing.

- The Northern Territory Government ensures that future housing includes energy efficiency and sustainability measures that enhance the financial and other wellbeing outcomes for tenants.

## People at the centre

### Recommendations

- The Northern Territory Government critically considers different cohorts impacted by housing unaffordability and homelessness, and their varying support needs in the development of housing policy.
- The Northern Territory Government equips housing and support services with tools and resources to recognise and effectively respond to the deep and complex individual risk factors experienced among different client cohorts.
- The Northern Territory Government ensures people experiencing family and domestic violence without permanent residency or citizenship (particularly those without work rights) can access housing and other services until their visa status is resolved.
- The Northern Territory Government acknowledges and plans for a continued unprecedented and increasing demand for housing and support services by women over 55.
- The Northern Territory Government ensures social and affordable housing is built, located, and makes adequate policy provision for pets.
- The Strategy recognises the intersection with multiple and complex needs, including needs arising from past trauma, alcohol and other drug-related issues, deinstitutionalisation and mental health.
- The Strategy acknowledges and addresses systemic cultural barriers that contribute to homelessness amongst Indigenous communities.

## Pathways

### Recommendations

- The Strategy prioritises early intervention and prevention initiatives.
- The Strategy commits to increase access to rapid re-housing approaches.
- The provision of appropriate support services for the duration of need is recognised as foundational for people to thrive and maintain their tenancies.
- The Strategy ensures the separation of tenancy and support services.
- The Strategy considers the critical role of transitional housing in responding to homelessness as part of community housing growth.

## Industry development

### Recommendations

- The development of the Northern Territory community housing model considers the unique social and demographic characteristics of the Territory's population.
- The Strategy recognises the enormous value of supporting the development of effective partnerships and collaboration with the diverse community organisations across the Northern Territory.
- That the Northern Territory Government acknowledges the additional financial costs for partnership formation and maintenance.
- The Strategy makes provision for the significant need to develop tailored community housing policy and practice guidance through close consultation with relevant service providers, current and future tenants.

## Implementation

### Recommendations

- The Northern Territory Government acknowledges that it is often an unrealistic goal for people to move on from social housing to the critically unaffordable housing market. This is particularly true for people experiencing significant disadvantage or people with complex needs.
- The Strategy acknowledges that outcomes measurement would be a more effective means to measure the social impact of the sector. Alternative social housing outcome measures could include a reduction in the need for support or better quality of life.



## About The Salvation Army

The Salvation Army is an international Christian movement with a presence in over 130 countries. Operating in Australia since 1880, The Salvation Army is one of the largest providers of social services and programs for people experiencing hardship, injustice and social exclusion.

The Salvation Army Australia has a national operating budget of over \$700 million and provides more than 1,000 social programs and activities through networks of social support services, community centres and churches across the country. Programs include:

- Financial inclusion, including emergency relief
- Homelessness services
- Youth services
- Family and domestic violence services
- Alcohol, drugs and other addictions
- Chaplaincy
- Emergency and disaster response
- Aged care
- Employment services

As a mission driven organisation, The Salvation Army seeks to reduce social disadvantage and create a fair and harmonious society through holistic and person-centred approaches that reflect our mission to share the love of Jesus by:

- Caring for people
- Creating faith pathways
- Building healthy communities
- Working for justice

We commit ourselves in prayer and practice to this land of Australia and its people, seeking reconciliation, unity and equity.

### Further Information

The Salvation Army would welcome the opportunity to discuss the content of this submission should any further information be of assistance.

Further information can be sought from Captain Peter Jones, Public Relations Secretary Northern Territory, at [peter.jones@salvationarmy.org.au](mailto:peter.jones@salvationarmy.org.au) or on 0414 772 871

