



# Social Justice STOCKTAKE



## Housing Affordability

Attributable to Secretary for Mission, Captain Stuart Glover

### Were you surprised to see housing affordability as the number two concern in the Stocktake?

We had expected that housing affordability would be at the very top of the list of most common social injustices and hardships identified. Even before the pandemic, rapidly rising housing costs were identified as being 'out of control' and the experience of the pandemic has highlighted that many people live in unsuitable and overcrowded accommodation.

Housing affordability is also a very visible social injustice unlike some of the others on the list. New media reports, almost every day, provide further insights and highlight new areas of concern – whether about house prices, rental increases, new cohorts at risk of homelessness or the impacts of 'sea change'/'tree change' on non-capital city communities during the pandemic.

### Why do you believe Australians are so concerned about this issue?

Alongside food and water, shelter is basic essential for human survival. We also know that there is more to it than just having safe and adequate housing. It is about what a home means to people.

Having a home provides the foundation for a person's ability to access and maintain employment, education, training, family and social networks, health and wellbeing. Without a home, achieving and maintaining these basic needs can be very difficult, and further exacerbates disadvantage.

Housing costs (whether mortgage or rent) represent the single largest household expense. For people on income support or other low incomes, even a small rise in housing costs can mean financial disaster and risk them falling into homelessness.

### How does housing affordability affect the work of The Salvation Army?

The Salvation Army is one of the largest providers of social services in Australia. Among other services, this includes our extensive housing, homelessness and Doorways emergency relief services.

Housing affordability affects the work of The Salvation Army in several ways, particularly in its links with homelessness and poverty:

- New cohorts of the 'working poor' are presenting to our services for the first time.
- Our homelessness services are stretched to capacity and can't keep up with demand. This is a terrible outcome and heartbreaking to see.
- The lack of affordable long-term housing as critical exit points from our crisis and transitional services means that the system is backed-up – people can't get on with their lives because



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they are stuck in refuge and other temporary accommodation, and people needing emergency accommodation can't get in.

## How is this issue contributing to mental health issues in Australia?

There is often a range of co-occurring presenting issues which we see increasing both in terms of prevalence and complexity at our homelessness services – most particularly mental ill-health.

The Salvation Army's observations indicate that an experience of homelessness leads to increased impact and complexity of existing trauma, substance use and mental ill-health.

People living with mental health issues are more likely to experience homelessness. Those with severe mental illness are more likely to experience higher housing stress and live in unstable housing.

Our data shows that, in 2018-19, 38 per cent of clients who presented to The Salvation Army's Specialist Homelessness Services were experiencing mental health issues.

We also know that the financial strain arising from rising housing costs and the fear of losing existing housing is causing mental health issues for many others.

## Some people see housing affordability as an issue affecting young people trying to get into the property market, but it goes much deeper doesn't it?

Housing affordability issues span across all ages and most income groups, but young people are disproportionately impacted. Even young people not contemplating home ownership (but just wanting to rent) are especially disadvantaged in a climate where their access to available, affordable rental properties is highly competitive. They often won't have rental references, have low incomes, and may be struggling with any number of additional issues if they come from troubled family backgrounds.

Anglicare Australia's annual [Rental Affordability Snapshot](#) has consistently shown that housing is particularly difficult for those living on government income support payments. The most recent Snapshot (April 2021) showed there were no listings (0 per cent) that were affordable for a person on Youth Allowance anywhere in the country.

## What can be done to address housing affordability?

The single most effective way to get people out of homelessness and affect affordability more generally is to invest significantly in new social and affordable housing. Australia will need to build one million new social and affordable rental homes for low and middle-income households over 20 years to meet current demand and keep pace with population growth (this is equivalent to 728,600 social housing properties and 295,000 affordable rental homes by 2036; or approximately 36,400 social housing properties a year and 14,800 affordable homes a year).

While issues of housing affordability are prevalent right across the housing continuum, The Salvation Army is most concerned about those who are most severely impacted – people on low and very low incomes who are either already homeless or are at risk of homelessness.



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If there is no change to make housing more accessible, what do you see as the ongoing concerns?

The Salvation Army is extremely concerned about the breadth and the depth of the current crisis in affordable housing.

Overall, we would expect to see rising numbers of people becoming homeless, more people being evicted for rental arrears and even greater competition for the cheapest properties. Crisis and transitional homelessness services will remain blocked due to the lack of exit points and there will be a rising tide of Australians falling into poverty, further reducing their ability to meaningfully engage and participate in society.