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Homelessness will continue to rise under unfair Budget

Homelessness Australia says that the Budget fails to deliver the big-picture solutions needed to end homelessness.

'While the increased security of funding for homelessness services is very welcome, the fact remains that we can't house the 105,000 Australians experiencing homelessness each night until there is a real increase in public housing to get 200,000 people off waiting lists,' said Ms Jenny Smith, Chair, Homelessness Australia.

The Treasurer announced that a new National Housing and Homelessness Agreement (NHHA) will replace the current National Affordable Housing Agreement (NAHA) and National Partnership Agreement on Homelessness (NPAH), but that the level of funding for homelessness services and public and community housing will only be maintained in real terms.

Ms Smith also criticised plans to cut welfare payments to people who fail drug tests or don't turn up to appointments, "Taking away the incomes of those who are already poor, have an addiction or mental health issue is a surefire way to fast-track them into homelessness."

"The Treasurer has failed in his promise to deliver a Budget that delivers fairness, opportunity and security for those doing it tough," she said.

"The most fundamental form of *security* is a safe and affordable place to live, and yet this Budget does nothing to get 200,000 people off public housing waiting lists.

"The best *opportunity* you can give your kids is a stable home, but 29,000 Australians under 18 will remain homeless under this Budget.

"This budget is not *fair*, because it fails to fix a broken housing system that encourages investors to own more than one house while 105,000 have no home at all," said Ms Smith.

"Maintaining the existing funding levels will allow homelessness services to keep the lights on, but they'll still be turning away 275 people every day, and we'll continue to see homelessness numbers climb."

"At the root of the homelessness problem is a chronic shortage of affordable housing for people on low incomes, and until we see bold and courageous leadership in this area, we will never end homelessness in Australia."

"With 200,000 people waiting for public and community housing, we urgently need to dramatically increase public and community housing by providing additional direct investment, or we're simply bailing water on a sinking ship," said Ms Smith.

The Treasurer also revealed details of a bond aggregator, which will enable community housing associations to access cheaper finance, plus the release of small packages of defence land, and minor changes to negative gearing.

"What is missing is the funding subsidy to allow community housing to house those on the lowest incomes. A bond aggregator will allow community housing to modestly increase the number of homes they build, but that doesn't remove the need for governments to continue to provide an ongoing rent subsidy for tenants on the lowest of incomes.

“A bond aggregator isn’t a silver bullet. Australia is grappling with a big homelessness problem, but we’ve yet to see a big solution. This Federal Budget is a missed opportunity to show the courage and leadership needed to solve this humanitarian crisis,” said Ms Smith.

Homelessness Australia has previously called on the Federal Government to: roll back negative gearing and capital gains tax; increase the supply of public housing; focus on preventing tenancy breakdown; create more short and medium term accommodation; better integrate existing services; invest in ‘Housing First’ and ‘Rapid Re-Housing’ services; increase the focus on prevention; establish better outcomes measurement and close the ‘homelessness gap’ for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. None of these options has been allocated additional funding in the Federal Budget.

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