



31 March 2025

To the Chair - Legal and Social Issues Committee, Parliament of Victoria

**Re: Inquiry into the redevelopment of Melbourne's public housing towers**

I am writing in response to the Inquiry into the redevelopment of Melbourne's public housing towers.

As the peak body representing organisations and individuals in Victoria committed to ending homelessness, Council to Homeless Persons is broadly supportive of the proposed redevelopments to our public housing towers as part of strategic work to provide more social housing for more Victorians.

Victoria's public housing towers are no longer fit-for-purpose. They are outdated, do not support integration with community, and cannot accommodate the needs of families or Victorians living with disability. CHP is therefore supportive in principle of the plan to redevelop the towers and provide Victorians in social housing with dignified, appropriate, and safe homes – and to provide more social housing overall.

CHP has a long history of advocating for increased supply of social housing, including public housing. After years of chronic underinvestment in social housing, it is critical that the Victorian government prioritise creative solutions to the housing crisis.

In 2023-24, 102,000 Victorians sought help from the specialist homelessness sector. Victoria's homeless and at risk populations are shifting: the most recent AIHW data shows that, over the last five years, there has been a 21 per cent increase in the number of Victorians sleeping rough, and there has been a 23 per cent increase in the number of employed Victorians visiting the specialist homelessness sector. Victorians are struggling to maintain their tenancies, and men's family violence continues to be the single biggest driver for Victorians to turn to the SHS for help. It is clear that, in the face of unprecedented crises, Victoria's social housing stock cannot meet demand.

Victoria has the lowest proportion of social housing in the country: just 2.9 per cent of dwellings. As a result, more than 65,000 Victorians are waiting for years on the social housing waitlist. 65,000 Victorians living in uncertainty, unable to put down roots, build community, or recover from the trauma of homelessness.

For years, the housing and homelessness sector has been calling for the urgent building of 60,000 additional social homes to bring the proportion of social housing in Victoria up to the national average. And this month Infrastructure Victoria has endorsed the affordability of this build,



recommending in its report *Victoria's draft 30-year infrastructure strategy* that the State Government fund the building of 60,000 new social homes over the next 15 years. This call from the Victorian Government's own infrastructure advisory body emphasises that this essential step to end the homelessness crisis is viable and cost-effective.

In light of this, the government's plan to increase the number of social homes by only 10 per cent during the redevelopment of the 44 public housing towers is inadequate. Currently, around 10,000 people live in these towers, and the redevelopment aims to accommodate 30,000. However, this would result in only 1,000 additional social homes, despite the significant increase in the number of people expected to live on these sites.

We recommend that the proportion of social housing in the redeveloped towers must be increased, as a practical way to start to put Infrastructure Victoria's recommendation into effect.

Public housing is an essential part of Victoria's social housing mix. So it is also important, considering the towers redevelopment in the broader context of the Government's overall development plans, that the amount of public housing across Victoria continues to grow. This must be considered in the mix of social housing in the redeveloped towers. Victoria needs a mix of community and public housing to ensure that all citizens in their diversity across a wide variety of communities have access to stable homes and the opportunity to thrive.

While CHP is supportive of the plan to redevelop the towers, this process must be done with care, and hold at its centre the needs and experiences of residents.

To that end, addressing the concerns of residents is paramount. Residents must be given the opportunity to have their concerns heard and responded to, and they must be treated with dignity and respect throughout the redevelopment process. While the public housing towers may no longer be fit-for-purpose, they are still home for tens of thousands of Melbournians. It is no small thing to know that your home will be demolished and re-built.

It is therefore imperative that individuals, families, and communities subject to compulsory relocation and displacement should be given the option to be relocated together. Connection to community is an inextricable part of healing and recovery: for many people who have experienced homelessness or housing insecurity, being removed from a forever home, even with the promise of a new and better home in the future, may be re-traumatising. Communities who are subject to compulsory relocation and displacement must be provided with high-quality, appropriate and temporary accommodation alongside culturally and age-appropriate wrap-around services.

To that end, Victorians who face compulsory relocation and displacement must be provided wrap-around support to mitigate the potentially traumatising experience of housing instability. Public housing residents often have pre-existing experiences of housing instability, including homelessness and disconnection from community. Individuals, families, and communities subject to relocation should have opt-in access to culturally appropriate supports, including mental health



care; employment and income generation opportunities in their new, temporary locales; and assistance settling into a new community.

Through the redevelopment process, the Victorian government must provide high-quality social housing that meets the diverse and changing needs of social housing residents. New homes should, at a minimum, have a variety of configurations suitable for changing families; offer multiple and single-bedroom units; be accessible for people who use wheelchairs and other mobility aids; be energy efficient; and have access to transportation, green spaces, health and social services and opportunities for income generation.

New homes should be built to the same standard as private housing at a minimum. Doing otherwise would entrench and formalise inequity and disadvantage.

Available plans for redevelopment put forward an ambitious vision for high-quality housing that can meet a range of needs. This is vitally important. Embedding intersectionality into housing by providing a range of units, with varying numbers of bedrooms and flexible communal spaces, making disability access central to re-development instead of just an afterthought, and the ability to adapt housing to meet changing needs throughout residents' life-course will ensure that residents can feel at home for the rest of their lives.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads 'Deborah Di Natale'.

Deborah Di Natale  
Chief Executive Officer