

3<sup>rd</sup> November 2017

Parliament of Victoria  
Legal and Social Issues Committee  
Melbourne, Victoria

Dear Sir/ Madam:

**Re: Parliamentary Inquiry into the Victorian Government's Public Housing Renewal Program**

Thank you for this opportunity to make a submission regarding the Public Housing Renewal Program.

We are pleased to make the below submission, responding to the issues outlined in the Submission Terms of Reference.

We submit this response on behalf of Transforming Housing and Launch Housing.

Sincerely,



Professor Carolyn Whitzman

Professor of Urban Planning  
Lead Researcher, Transforming Housing research network

## SUBMISSION CONTRIBUTORS

### **Transforming Housing**

Since 2013, the Transforming Housing Partnership (<https://msd.unimelb.edu.au/transforming-housing-affordable-housing-all>) has brought together affordable housing researchers at the University of Melbourne with state and local government policy makers, private and non-profit housing developers, private and philanthropic funders, and other experts to work together on improving the quantity and quality of well-located affordable housing in Metropolitan Melbourne.

Transforming Housing acknowledges the contributions of the Brotherhood of St Laurence in supporting the development of this submission. The submission does not reflect the views of every member of the partnership.

Transforming Housing will also contribute to discussions surrounding the Public Housing Renewal Program by hosting a '[Maximising the social benefits of public housing renewal](#)' event on December 12<sup>th</sup> 2017. This event will be supported by a background paper discussing ways to maximise the quality and quantity of affordable housing delivered through public housing and international best practice on public housing renewal. Following the event, we will make a summary from the panel discussion publicly available. While these activities and outputs fall outside the November 2017 deadline for Public Housing Renewal Inquiry submissions we feel they are vitally important in shaping policy and decisions surrounding this program and will bring stakeholders together to discuss the topic in a 'neutral' space. We encourage all interested parties to attend.

### **Launch Housing**

Launch Housing is an independent Melbourne based community organisation formed from the merger of HomeGround Services and Hanover. Launch Housing one of Victoria's largest providers of housing and homelessness support services. We provide flexible, specialist services that directly assist thousands of men, women, young people, children and families every year. We are strong advocates for affordable housing and leaders of research into homelessness that delivers better outcomes for our clients and lasting, positive change for our community.

## RESPONSE TO THE INQUIRY INTO THE PUBLIC HOUSING RENEWAL

This submission will address the following aspects of the Terms of Reference;

1. the adequacy of a proposed 10 per cent increase in public housing (or 1,100 public units) on the sites given the size of the waiting list for public housing;
2. the ability to cater for all demographics including families, couples and singles with the proposed housing mix;
3. the effects on current public housing tenants
4. the allocation of parts of the sites between the proposed new public and private housing units;
8. the proposed loss of third party appeal rights;

## SUBMISSION OVERVIEW

<b>Acknowledging the change</b>	<p>We welcome and acknowledge the State government's current commitment to investing in and supporting social and affordable housing. The Public Housing Renewal Program is part of a broader suite of activities and funds outlined in Homes For Victorians and Plan Melbourne aimed at improving housing outcomes for very low to moderate income households. This commitment is welcome, given decades of underinvestment in social and affordable housing in Victoria.</p>
<b>More investment is required to meet need</b>	<p>There is a deficit of 30,000 units affordable to extremely low income households in Greater Melbourne</p> <p>To meet the needs of those eligible for the Priority List of the Victorian Housing Register, Victoria would need 53,105 additional social housing units between 2016 and 2031 – that is 3,540 dwellings per year</p> <p>The current PHRP may yield as little as 110 additional dwellings and this figure is demonstrably too low given the levels of need in Victoria.</p> <p>We also question the premise that profits derived from this program will be channelled into creating or maintaining social housing in other locations. We question why funds should be channelled into other, undisclosed locations when it could more fruitfully and immediately contribute to greater proportions of social housing on the well-located public housing properties included in the PHRP.</p>
<b>A 10% increase is far from best practice</b>	<p>International and domestic models have utilised multiple funding streams to deliver far higher levels of public housing increase.</p> <p>Similarly, many international examples have made their development models and costs publicly accessible to allow for an informed debate. This should be the case in Melbourne.</p>
<b>Selling off public land is a short-sighted strategy.</b>	<p>Selling off public land is a short-sighted strategy. These sites are unique and valuable opportunities to generate affordable housing options in areas that offer good access to job opportunities and public transport to enable those on lower incomes to actively participate in Victoria's dynamic and changing labour market.</p> <p>These sites should involve a higher mix of rental units, both at market and below market rates.</p>
<b>Needs of current and future residents</b>	<p>The needs and experiences of existing tenants is paramount. It is not enough to simply offer them right of return and to relocate tenants, there is a need for support systems and genuine community engagement and empowerment.</p>
<b>Community support and planning for affordable housing</b>	<p>There is a need to embed affordable and social housing targets and plans at the local government, sub-regional and regional scales. These discussions and plans are imperative to delivering overarching housing goals and for build community acceptance of social and affordable housing</p>

## RECOMMENDATIONS

We recommend that the Committee recommends the Victorian Government;

1. The public housing renewal program should achieve at least a 50% increase in the amount of new social housing dwellings across the renewal program (this should be measured in units and bedrooms to avoid loss of housing occurring through 3 bedroom units being replaced with smaller dwellings)
2. That rental housing affordable to very low (less than 50% Area Median Income), low income (50 – 79% Area Median Income) and moderate income (80% - 120% Area Median Income) is incorporated into every renewal location
3. That transparency is increased surrounding this program by;
  - a. Releasing the business case, including determinations around value for money
  - b. Requiring developers to 'open their books' on projects' costs and anticipated profits
  - c. Releasing outcomes of future profit-sharing provisions, including any share received by the Victorian Government, and where the monies are directed.
4. Consider current residents circumstances when determining the composition of dwelling types and sizes to ensure existing tenants are able to meaningfully exercise the 'right of return' they have been guaranteed.
5. Develop a Compact for Renewal between agencies and developers undertaking the Public Housing Renewal Program and affected social housing residents. Enable residents to contribute practical insights into how to manage renewal in a way that is respectful, supportive and empowering. Continue and improve the resident group models currently in place in other estates
6. Foster inclusion by 'salt and peppering' social and private housing throughout the sites in small clusters, designing public and private dwellings that are indistinguishable from each other and by creating spaces that can be equally shared by different residents of the development.
7. Collaborate with local governments to set affordable housing targets and engage with the broader community about how best to meet those targets.
8. Create a legacy of increased economic participation among social housing tenants by using procurement processes associated with the Public Housing Renewal Program to open up training and employment opportunities.

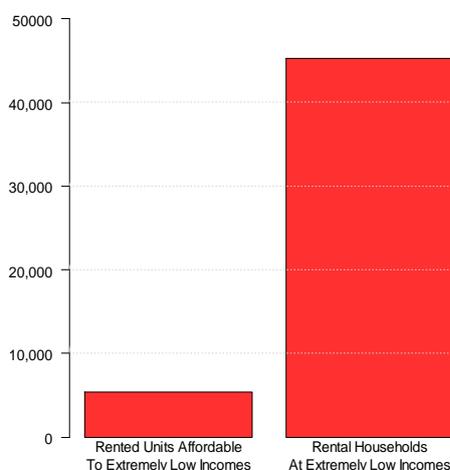
## THE ADEQUACY OF A PROPOSED 10 PER CENT INCREASE IN PUBLIC HOUSING ON THE SITES GIVEN THE SIZE OF THE WAITING LIST FOR PUBLIC HOUSING;

### *The degree of need*

There is a huge unmet need for housing affordable to and appropriate for extremely low income households. There are various ways of measuring this unmet need and they are listed below. They all point to the same conclusion: there is a vast discrepancy between the amount of housing *needed* by extremely low to moderate income households and the amount of housing *available* to these groups.

- Only 2.5% of Melbourne’s housing stock is public housing rental, well below Australia’s average of 4.8% (Groenhart & Burke, 2014).
- Hulse, Reynolds, and Yates (2014) estimate that in 2011 there was a shortage of 72,200 homes available and affordable for households in the lowest 40% of income levels. This figure was a 35% increase from 2006 levels.
- To meet the needs of those eligible for the Priority List of the Victorian Housing Register, Victoria would need 53,105 additional social housing units between 2016 and 2031 – that is 3,540 dwellings per year. To meet the needs of households eligible for the ‘Register of Interest’ part of the Victorian Housing Register, Victoria would need 101,000 additional social housing units between 2016 and 2031 – that is 6,700 dwellings per year (Burke, 2016).
- Recent research from Transforming Housing using data from 2016 reveals a 30,000 shortfall in rental units affordable to extremely low income households (those making less than 35% of area median income). This is presented in Figure 1. This startling figure does not include individuals, single parents, and couples who may be homeless, “couch surfing” or relying on the generosity of friends or family while waiting for affordable units to become available. Their inclusion, which is difficult to measure with existing census data, would only expand the measurement of this shortfall dramatically.

**Figure 1: Gap between the need and the supply of rental units affordable to extremely low income households in Greater Melbourne**



Source: Palm, M (2017) Transforming Housing Calculations

### *Degree of housing provision*

The information provided by the state government about the PHRP is very unclear as to (1) the number of units being refurbished or demolished and rebuilt; (2) the number of new units being provided; (3) any calculations of targets based on need for public or affordable housing. If 1,100 'properties' are being redeveloped in nine sites with a goal for 'at least' a 10% net increase in dwellings, according to the Housing Minister's media release on December 1, this could result in only 110 new units – a drop in the bucket of need. Homes for Victorians states a target of 2,500 social housing units being refurbished or rebuilt and 2,200 new units being provided over five years: the latter figure equates to 440 units per year. In short, even using the low targets set by the government that would come nowhere near to meeting the needs of those on the waiting list, let alone the needs of a growing population. The public housing redevelopment would come nowhere close to meeting those targets.

We would be extremely willing to contribute to discussions about the modelling and trade-offs involved in this program. However, it is difficult to know how to respond to the PHRP without knowledge of the costs and potential profit associated with this project. We would like to see information about

- How and why the 10% dwelling increase figure was reached
- The anticipated cost of development of new social housing dwellings
- The land valuations of the public housing sites
- Forecasted profits for sale of market housing
- Provision of additional non-housing outputs such as community facilities

This information would make it easier to contribute meaningfully and usefully to the debate about the PHRP. Public land redevelopment involving the use of tax credits in the United States requires developers to 'open their books' on projects' costs and anticipated profits. This is a matter of public interest and deserves public scrutiny. We believe a similar approach should be adopted in Victoria.

We also question the premise that profits derived from this program will be channelled into creating or maintaining social housing in other locations. We question why funds should be channelled into other, undisclosed locations when it could more fruitfully and immediately contribute to greater proportions of social housing on the well-located public housing properties included in the PHRP.

There are many examples of social housing redevelopment that have yielded much higher levels of social housing increase. Very often these projects are accompanied by affordable housing managed by community housing providers to ensure their on-going affordability. Some of these projects are summarised in Table 1. It is acknowledged that every project is different and subject to different constraints and contexts. We would be happy to work with the government to model improved social and affordable housing yields.

**Table 1: Comparing international examples of public housing renewal**

Project	Policy or Program	Location	Partners	Pre-redevelopment	Post-redevelopment
<b>Proposed Flemington Estate; 6.3 Hectares</b>  [Example Public Housing Renewal Site]	Public Housing Renewal Program	Melbourne, Victoria, Australia	TBC. Consortium between private developer and potentially a Housing Association	Currently 916 public housing dwellings 198 existing public housing dwellings will be demolished	Indicative: 218 new social housing dwellings (10% increase on previous)  0 affordable rental properties  825 private properties (Moonee Valley City Council, 2017)
<b>Ivanhoe Estate; 8.2 Ha</b>	Communities Plus; including \$120 million towards social and community infrastructure and \$21 million towards social housing programs	Sydney, NSW, Australia	Consortium comprising Frasers Property Australia, Citta Property Group and Mission Housing Australia (CHP)	Currently 259 social housing properties	950 social housing properties (369% increase)  128 affordable rental properties  1922 private dwellings  A high school 2 childcare centres An aged-care facility Community facilities (NSW Government, 2017)
<b>Alice Griffith</b>	Choice Neighbourhoods Initiative, included \$30.5 million investment from	Eastern Bayview, San Francisco, US	McCormack Baron Salazar (private developer) and San Francisco	Originally affordable 256 units	500 very low-income units (195% increase)  31 moderate income units

	the Federal Government		Housing Authority		281 “workforce” units  310 market-rate units (Pendall & Hendey, 2013)
<b>Little Mountain; 6 Ha</b>	Vancouver Major Project	Vancouver, BC, Canada	BC Housing, City of Vancouver, Holborn Properties	224 public housing units	282 social housing units (26% increase)  10 Musqueam Nation units  Childcare facility Neighbourhood house Public spaces (BC Housing, 2017)
<b>Regent Park; 28 Ha</b>	Toronto Community Housing Revitalisation Project	Toronto, Ontario, Canada	Toronto Community Housing, Daniels (development partner)	Originally 2,083 units	310 additional affordable units (15% increase)  5,400 market units  Community Amenities including health centre, school, recreation centre, park/sports ground, and arts centre (Toronto Community Housing, 2017)

## THE ABILITY TO CATER FOR ALL DEMOGRAPHICS INCLUDING FAMILIES, COUPLES AND SINGLES WITH THE PROPOSED HOUSING MIX;

*\* Please note, while Launch Housing supports all other aspects of this submission, their perspectives are not reflected in this section. They support high proportions of one bedroom units as a reflection of the needs of the groups they service.*

We are concerned by the proposal to predominantly provide 1 and 2 bedroom apartments in the new social housing dwellings. We acknowledge that the Housing Assistance in Australia 2017 report published by the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare categorised 16% of public housing dwellings and 12% of community housing dwellings across Australia as ‘underutilised’ in 2017. However, this figure differs across different states and locations. Similarly, social housing occupancy levels are often subject to under-reporting as extended families may occupy homes together and not be recorded. In the case of the Public Housing Renewal Program, a lack of larger dwellings will restrict the ability for families and larger households to occupy these homes

There should be a direct consideration of the current occupants of public housing estates when deciding on the composition of dwelling types and sizes. The ‘right of return’ for public housing tenants is meaningless if their 3 bedroom apartment is replaced with a 1 bedroom apartment that will not fit their household. In the Flemington Housing Estate, the walk-up flats due for demolition and renewal feature a high proportion of 3 bedroom apartments (see Table 2). Three-bedroom apartments are a rare housing typology in inner suburban Melbourne and therefore provide an important resource.

If the existing three bedroom apartments are replaced by smaller dwellings there could be a net decrease in the number of people accessing social housing on these sites. For example, the Carlton Renewal resulted in 192 walk-up units being replaced by 246 new public units. However, the original units were all 3-bedroom, and the replacement units are mainly one bedroom, with fewer two and 3-bedroom units. Therefore, the outcome is likely to be a decrease in the number of occupants housed on this estate. To sell public land for a net decrease in social housing places would represent a net loss in state resources at huge cost with the long-term loss of public housing in areas where the cost of housing is unattainable to low-income households. We recommend that all consideration of social housing increases should include both the number of dwellings and the number of bedrooms provided to avoid this net loss outcome.

**Table 2: Current homes in Flemington Estate Walk-ups**

Homes	Number
Bedsit	36
1 bedroom	18
3 bedroom	144
Total	<b>198</b>
Total Bedrooms	<b>486</b>

Source: Victorian Public Tenants Association (2017)

## THE EFFECTS ON CURRENT PUBLIC HOUSING TENANTS:

### *Ensure resident involvement and empowerment*

The impact of renewal on current public housing tenants should be a central consideration in all decisions about the timing, design and delivery of renewal. There are already resident reference groups in many public housing estates in Melbourne and they should be empowered and resourced to ensure resident perspectives are meaningfully integrated into decisions.

Shelter NSW, Tenants' Union of NSW and the City Futures Research Centre UNSW (2017) conducted a series of focus groups with tenants from eight estates in Sydney that have experienced renewal programs in the last decade or were scheduled to experience renewal in the near future. These focus groups were part of a broader project to develop a Compact for Renewal between agencies undertaking urban renewal in Sydney and social housing tenants affected by renewal. These focus groups generated important, practical insights into how to manage renewal in a way that respects, supports and empowers current tenants based on five key principles. These are; Respect for Tenants; Acknowledgment that renewal has damaging and disruptive impacts; Impacts will be mitigated and minimised; Commitment to real engagement; and; Tenants to receive a fair share of the benefits of renewal. Importantly, these principles were complemented by implementation requirements, reproduced in Figure 2. These same principles should be applied in Victoria.

**Figure 2: Requirements for Public Housing Renewal**

**Requirements for Public Housing Renewal: An example of a Compact that could be applied in Victoria**

**Planning and setting up the renewal project**

- A *social impact assessment* to be carried out for all projects, so social impacts are identified early and strategies to mitigate and manage them are set out. Tenants should be key informants for this assessment.
- *Social planning* should identify the social and community structures and organisations that are valued in the community and a plan developed for retaining and transitioning them.
- A *Social Plan* to be developed alongside a physical masterplan, setting out the community facilities, support services and community services to be provided for the new community.
- The project team to include staff whose job it is to engage with residents, including *bilingual staff*. Tenants also want the project leader to accept them as key stakeholders and to 'meet them as equals'.
- An *on site office* should be provided where tenants are always welcome, where good information is available and tenant's questions can be answered.
- Tenants want a *Community Reference Group* (or similar) to be set up for all projects—a secure and respected vehicle for community input to the planning and implementation of the project. Tenants also want a strong residents voice in all aspects of the project, including support for an *independent tenants' group*.

**Community engagement**

- Tenants to be *fully engaged* in projects as an important project stakeholder. Agencies should invest in *capacity building* to support tenants to participate more fully and meaningfully.
- An *engagement plan* should be prepared and tenants consulted about it before it is finalised. Project staff should report back to the community on the plan and involve residents in reviewing the plan periodically.
- Tenants want *quality information* to be provided about the project and how it will impact on them and the community. This information should be regularly updated and made available in many formats including a regular newsletter (or similar), face to face and at community meetings and events.
- *Consultation* should seek to reach all groups including harder to reach groups. *Consultation approaches* should be creative and varied to appeal and attract participation from the full range of population groups.

**Managing change and the adverse impacts of renewal**

- Agencies to provide a comprehensive range of practical, emotional and professional/specialist *support services* to assist tenants to better manage change and adverse impacts—including physical health, mental health, dislocation, stress, anxiety, grief and loss, and trauma.
- An *independent tenant advocacy service* for all renewal projects, spanning individual advocacy and collective or project-wide advocacy.
- Recognising the damaging affects of a loss of choice and control, tenants want agencies to extend choice and control in as many areas as possible, including choice of relocation areas, replacement homes, home improvements and control over the timing of the move.

**Relocation and resettlement**

- Consistently good *relocation practice*, including a relocation coordinator who will 'go the extra mile' to support tenants through the process, and *better training* for coordinators in issues like trauma, grief and loss.
- Improved support for tenants to resettle in a new neighbourhood, including better information about services, transport, schools etc., and access to *resettlement support*
- Support for tenants to *downsize and declutter*, including access to a service to assist tenants over a period of time prior to moving

Source: Shelter NSW, Tenants Union of NSW, City Futures Research Centre UNSW, 2017

### *Connecting housing with services and training opportunities*

As social housing has become more tightly targeted to households in greatest need, a much lower proportion of tenants are employed - joblessness is as high as 80% in some estates. Many tenants of working age wish to gain paid employment or increase their hours if underemployed, but face substantial systemic and personal barriers to doing so.

Social housing assistance needs to be much more closely integrated with employment assistance, social procurement initiatives and related reforms (such as reducing financial disincentives in rent rules for tenants to take up work) to boost employment among tenants and open options for other housing arrangements.

For example, the Victorian Government funds the Community Safety Information Service - a supported traineeship for security and concierge services in some of Melbourne's high rise public housing estates delivered by the Brotherhood. This Service has very strong outcomes with around 80% of participants transitioning to mainstream employment (mostly with private security companies) following their traineeship. It is delivered at similar costs to a private security company, yet provides significant additional value for money by improving safety, empowering communities, and providing pathways into sustainable employment. It has also served to provide positive role models, by demonstrating the capacity of public tenants to be both functional employees and service providers in their own communities.

Likewise, the Victorian Government funded Work and Learning Centres (in Fitzroy/Carlton, Moe, Shepparton, Geelong, Ballarat) are proving effective at supporting highly disadvantaged jobseekers, including many public housing tenants, to build their skills and secure employment (Bodsworth, 2015).

Significant opportunities exist to generate employment opportunities for tenants (and other disadvantaged jobseekers) through the Public Housing Renewal Program, by requiring training and employment outcomes as part of the related commissioning processes for the redevelopment (e.g. construction, landscaping) and future operation of the sites (e.g. aged care facility, concierge; cleaning and maintenance services).

To support practical realisation of such a social procurement approach, it is critical that successful tenderers be required to connect with experienced intermediaries that can assist in getting disadvantaged jobseekers prepared to successfully sustain work. Existing state-funded employment services—including Jobs Victoria Employment Network providers and the Work & Learning Centres—could be leveraged. Previous attempts to procure employment outcomes for disadvantaged jobseekers have revealed the challenges of contracting for outcomes without embedding the support of an intermediary. Contractors are unlikely to meet targets if left to reach out to disadvantaged jobseekers themselves and may have a negative experience if jobseekers are not adequately prepared and supported once in work.

## THE ALLOCATION OF PARTS OF THE SITES BETWEEN THE PROPOSED NEW PUBLIC AND PRIVATE HOUSING UNITS

Mixed-tenure developments that integrate housing so that social and private properties are located side by side and are not discernibly different from each other, is more successful in achieving a socially cohesive neighbourhood than other models of tenure mix (Groves, Middleton, Murie, & Broughton, 2003; Roberts, 2007). Similarly, urban design should allow for a variety of spaces ranging from private to semi-private and semi-public to public (Arthurson, 2010). This is to allow residents to choose the degree to which they interact with people from different groups. For a more detailed review of literature pertaining to the design of public housing estates see Levin, Arthurson, and Ziersch (2014).

Reference to best practice design and learning from past experiences is vital to avoiding design mistakes that could lead to segregated communities. The Carlton Public Housing Estate is one such example where conflicting interests resulted in suboptimal design and resident experience outcomes (Levin et al., 2014). Levin, Arthurson and Ziersch (2014) argue that the design of the Carlton Public Housing estate, particularly the separation of public and private housing, has led to poor social inclusion. Their work recounts how the original plan to 'pepper pot' social housing throughout the development was abandoned, much to the disappointment of many stakeholders. The resultant design involved three buildings that do not interact with each other and a physical barrier between public spaces available to residents of public and private dwellings. Future public housing redevelopment should seek to avoid this design outcome by pepper potting housing throughout the estate in small clusters where possible, designing public and private dwellings to not be distinguishable from each other and by creating a hierarchy of spaces that can be equally shared by different residents of the development.

## THE PROPOSED LOSS OF THIRD PARTY APPEAL RIGHTS;

We strongly support greater collaboration with local government in proactively setting affordable housing targets and then discussing with the community – including current social housing residents, prospective social housing residents, and other residents in the community – how best to meet those targets. [Vancouver does this particularly well.](#)

We support maximising government investment in affordable and social housing and acknowledge that third party appeals often slow or inhibit affordable housing projects from occurring, increasing holding costs and constraining supply. Similarly, third party objection and appeal rights may “result in adversarial rather than deliberative review processes; mediate conflict between developers and elite residents rather than the wider public; draw resources away from other participatory planning styles (e.g. community consultation at earlier stages of the planning process); and that courts of appeal may take planning authority away from elected officials at the local level” (Cook, Taylor, Hurley, & Colic-Peisker, 2012, p. 1). Therefore, we would argue for a greater focus on upfront community engagement and support reduced opportunities for third party appeal on affordable housing projects that conform with planning considerations.

## ON-GOING CONSIDERATIONS AND COLLABORATIONS

We acknowledge that the Public Housing Renewal Program is just one element of a larger package of projects and policy changes designed to increase the amount of affordable housing in Victoria. We also acknowledge that social housing and affordable housing should be funded and supported at local, state and federal levels. We are happy to assist in advocacy efforts to campaign for greater federal funding for affordable housing. Transforming Housing is working on a range of outputs that support these goals including a collaboration with the Lord Mayor's Charitable Foundation to identify viable financing models for a mix of rental housing for very low income people, as well as a locational 'scoring' model to help identify suitable parcels of government land where social housing could be scaled up.

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