

Housing

Australia is facing a national housing crisis

Economic justice

Urgent human rights issues

Too many people do not have adequate housing or are homeless. There is a pressing need for a national housing plan that addresses the human rights impacts, including by addressing affordability and availability as well as security of tenure for renters.

Australia is facing a national housing crisis. The combined impact of lack of public and affordable housing, reduction in social security and income supports, and rising cost of living have caused increasing homelessness. The right to adequate housing is not sufficiently protected by legislation or policy. State and territory human rights legislation offers some limited protections in relation to housing. However, the right to adequate housing is not reflected in any state or territory human rights legislation.

The 2021 Australian census estimates 122,494 were experiencing homeless, a 5.2% increase since 2016. An additional 273,600 people sought help from homeless agencies between 2022 and 2023. Older women, women and children who have experienced domestic violence, First Peoples, and people with disability are disproportionately affected. They face discriminatory barriers to safe and secure housing.

First Nations peoples are affected by particular challenges, with the majority of housing stock being designed according to cultural norms that do not reflect Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples' kinship, family, or cultural systems. First Nations people are more likely than non-Indigenous people to be living in housing that does not meet minimum quality standards, and more likely to be living in overcrowded housing.

Priority action

The Australian Government should adopt a human-rights based National Housing Strategy.

Housing is not affordable

The proportion of all households experiencing housing stress increased from 2021 to 2023, to 10.6% of all households experiencing housing stress. The proportion of lower income households experiencing severe rental stress – that is, paying over 50% of their income in rent, increased to 21% in 2023. 54% of low-income households were experiencing rental stress, that is, paying more than 30% of their income on housing. People experiencing rental stress were more likely to report lower wellbeing, and material deprivation in other aspects such as lower savings, accessing dental treatment, and having a motor vehicle. Housing insecurity is also increasing across middle income groups; driven by high mortgages that are pushing Australian household debt to be some of the highest in the world.

Existing housing protections are piecemeal. The National Housing and Homelessness Plan does not define or protect the human right to adequate standard of living.

Australia does not have enough social housing

Social housing is recommended by experts in housing and homelessness prevention. Social housing as a proportion of total available housing has declined annually, and is now 3.6% of all housing stock. Waiting lists for social housing have increased annually – over the previous 10 years, to 41% of people on waiting lists for public housing in 2025 were identified as being households with the highest need. This proportion has been increasing steadily over the past 10 years. The Australian Government has delivered additional social housing investment through the Housing Australia Future Fund. However, housing specialists have emphasised that this measure is unlikely to deliver the required growth in social housing needed to meet demand.

Priority action

The Australian Government should take immediate steps to ensure progressive realisation of the fundamental right to adequate housing, which includes establishing domestic legal protections in accordance with Australia’s international obligations, co-designing inclusive, national housing and homelessness strategies, and increasing investments in affordable, accessible, and safe housing for people living in poverty.