

Interim Progress Analysis for the evaluation of the Queensland Housing Strategy 2017-2027

Department of Housing and Public Works in partnership
with the **University of Queensland** (Institute for Social
Science Research) working with ARTD Consultants

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Overview

The *Queensland Housing Strategy 2017-2027* (the Housing Strategy) is a ten-year transformation of Queensland's housing and homelessness service system. The Housing Strategy vision is that every Queenslander has access to a safe and secure home that meets their needs and supports them to fully participate in the social and economic life of the state.

In November 2019, DHPW formed a partnership with the Institute for Social Science Research at the University of Queensland, working with ARTD Consultants, to evaluate the Housing Strategy. The partnership is an innovative approach to evaluation, with the team from ISSR and ARTD working in close collaboration with DHPW to jointly develop a monitoring and evaluation framework and assess progress and outcomes delivered.

The partnership is a flagship project of ISSR's Social Solutions research group that is providing collaborative, evidenced-based and outcomes-focused research and evaluation support through an operational partnership. Through the partnership, the ISSR team has been providing agile support to DHPW that recently included delivery of the overarching monitoring and evaluation framework for the Housing Strategy. This partnership approach highlights that policy success is not just about achieving outcomes, but also about working with stakeholders directly and acting where needed. A key approach of the initial phase of the partnership was the embedding of members of the evaluation team within DHPW, working from departmental workspaces. This has enabled the ISSR team to readily build relationships, provide practical support and understand not just the policy intent but the real time experience of departmental officials and stakeholders in implementing the Housing Strategy.

Housing Systems Responding to Needs

The housing system is changing, and housing system reform is evident in Australian and international jurisdictions. These reforms are a response to the dynamic challenges impacting governments, communities and the housing market. The challenges include rapid urban population growth, growing social inequity, public finance constraints, rising homelessness, declining housing affordability, ageing population, climate change, displaced and mobile International populations, digital disruption, politicisation of housing and others¹.

These challenges combine to affect the performance of the housing system and, in particular, the social housing sector. The Queensland housing system is also subject to all these pressures which will only be exacerbated by the State's decentralised character and the uneven impact of economic restructuring, population mobility and disaster events on urban, regional and remote communities.

Queensland Context: Practice Challenges

As well as the housing system pressures identified above, there are challenges that are particular to Queensland including:

- A non-prescriptive statutory planning environment for affordable housing;
- Decentralised state with growing demand for stable affordable housing in urban and regional areas;
- Fluctuating housing markets in regional resource communities;
- Remote Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Local Government Authorities that aspire to self-determination and sustainability;
- Extreme climate events differentially impacting locations and vulnerable households;

¹ Parsell, C, Cheshire, L, Walter, Z & Clarke, A 2019, Social housing after neo-liberalism: New forms of state-driven welfare intervention towards social renters. *Housing Studies*. doi.org/10.1080/02673037.2018.1563673.

- Concentrations of ageing, detached, predominantly three-bedroom public housing stock on large lots;
- Splintered social service system with limited linked data or integrated case coordination;
- System and workforce capacity limits for case coordination/management;
- A community housing sector that is emerging, but not as developed as in other jurisdictions; and
- Challenge in moving from pilots to embedded new practice in homelessness and tenant support.

These challenges add significant complexity to the delivery of a robust Queensland housing system.

The Queensland Housing Strategy 2017-2027

In the context of this dynamic economic, social and natural environment, the Housing Strategy is underpinned by new partnerships, person-centred practices and technology that shifts the Government from 'business as usual' practices. The new practices are designed to stabilise and improve the Queensland housing system.

When benchmarked to international and interstate jurisdictions, the Housing Strategy is on target to deliver a multi-sectoral response for housing system reform. An initial finding from a recent review of DHPW policies, procedures and practices is that the reforms embedded in the Housing Strategy are consistent with the housing system reforms in comparable jurisdictions that face similar pressures to Queensland. Common themes consistent across Queensland and other jurisdictions (UK, New Zealand, Victoria, New South Wales and Western Australia) are:

- Use of Machinery of government changes to position social housing within human service agencies;
- Each has new housing strategies, or is in the process for refreshing their approach;
- Partnerships between sectors to grow supply and manage tenancies;
- Shifting away from a punitive approach to breaches and evictions to focus more on supporting people to sustain tenancies; and
- General move to transparency and improvements in data collection, performance monitoring and reporting within and across government.

How much has been done and early indicators of the Housing Strategy's value

The findings of the Interim Analysis show that the Housing Strategy is on target to meet its objective to reform the Queensland housing system. Underpinned by person-centred practices, new partnerships and technology, major change is occurring that will stabilise and improve the performance of the Queensland housing system.

The Housing Strategy is organised around four pillars: Growth, Prosperity, Connections and Confidence. For the purposes of monitoring and evaluation these have been developed in three Strategic Action Areas (SAAs): 'Growing Supply', 'Service System Reform' and 'Consumer Confidence'. These SAAs are underpinned by three cross-cutting key principle enablers: partnerships, place based and person-centred design and delivery. The Interim Analysis has used this framework to assess the early progress and collective contribution of key strategic actions selected of the overall Housing Strategy. Progress on each of these actions according to SAA is summarised below.

Strategic Action Areas – Early Highlights from Action Plan 2017-2020

1. Growing Supply

- 1,949 social housing dwellings commenced by 30 June 2020, exceeding the three-year target by 249 dwellings. Of these, 1,061 are completed at 30 June 2020.²
- An estimated 1,800 jobs have been supported by the construction of social housing commenced since June 2017.³
- 79% of high and very high need applicants require a one or two-bedroom dwelling. A target of 80% one or two-bedroom dwellings has been set. Based on commencements and completion data, this target has been exceeded with 94 per cent of completed units one or two bedroom.
- Improved partnerships with the community housing sector to deliver new affordable housing through implementation of development plans (new funding, financing and legal settings) with registered community housing providers.
- Increased supply of housing in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Local Government areas with the construction of 331 new homes and 29 extensions; commencement of the \$40m Interim Remote Capital program with key outputs agreed between DHPW and local councils including 49 new houses, up to 50 extensions to existing dwellings and significant land supply reforms across 16 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Local Governments Areas and the Torres Shire including 35 new lot developments.
- Home ownership on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communal land is also progressing and supporting the development of diversified housing markets in remote and discrete communities. This includes the transfer of 99 social housing dwellings into private home ownership and agreement of sale prices for purchase of social housing under 99-year home ownership leases between DHPW and Trustees (seven to date).⁴
- Construction of the Cowboys NRL facility in Townsville to accommodate young Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women from remote communities pursuing education and employment opportunities.

2. Service System Reform

- Implementation of new client centred information management systems throughout 2019-2020 including the Front of House Tool, Person Dashboard and Customer Management System (operational in October 2019) are supporting more person centred and holistic intake, assessment and allocations processes as part of DHPW's new service delivery operating model. Front of House tools for staff also complement the on-line user-friendly housing portal and two new housing apps: Housing Assist and Tenant Assist. The design and implementation of these new and enhanced information technologies and progressive modernisation of housing service centres have been key enablers of the Housing Strategy's broader service system reforms. The final evaluation of Action Plan 2017-2020 should be able to provide more evidence on the effectiveness of these new systems.
- DHPW has designed and implemented a number of targeted initiatives to address the needs of specific vulnerable groups including:
 - The Next Steps Home program, for women on parole or at risk of being remanded in custody in South East Queensland and Townsville, has been lauded as providing innovative, integrated end-to-end 'throughcare' support for women leaving prison as a way of reintegrating into society, giving women stable housing for 12 months post-release. The range of supportive services include assistance with debt management and budgeting, support around desistance from offending behaviour, employment, family relationships,

² Figure updated to 30 June 2020.

³ Figure updated to 30 June 2020.

⁴ Figure updated to 30 June 2020.

self-care and substance abuse. Interim findings from an independent evaluation has found the program to be successful with noted challenges, and these preliminary findings show that even with assistance, participants continue to struggle to afford rent as related to difficulties in finding employment and in regaining custody of their children and accessing associated support payments.

- Design and construction of two new youth foyers, one on the Gold Coast (design completed and construction commenced) and one in Townsville, and expansion of the Logan facility from 22 to 40 units to provide housing and support services for young people and support them to achieve independence (completed). For all three, there is evidence of co-design and project level evaluation.
- New integrated housing and homelessness services being established in Toowoomba (Hub completed and operational from August 2018). More recently, \$1.93m invested in the Coordinated Housing and Homelessness Response – Integrating Services (integrating services approach) in nine key locations across Queensland – Brisbane, Moreton Bay, Logan, Redlands, Townsville, Mackay, Sunshine Coast, Cairns, and Gold Coast. Place Based Response Teams work with funded outreach providers to proactively identify and engage people experiencing homelessness and link them with the housing and support service they need. Funded Care Coordination Facilitators increase capability of local care coordination groups to deliver integrated housing with support for people with complex needs.
- Improved housing responses for women and children escaping domestic and family violence through the construction of new crisis shelters in Caboolture and Gold Coast (due for completion very soon) and replacement/renewing shelters in Southport (near completion) Cherbourg (complete), Pormpuraaw (complete) and Woorabinda (near completion) – there is evidence of co-design and community engagement in design.⁵
- Partnering for Impact with non-government service providers as a comprehensive program to reduce homelessness is being implemented through key measures including a compact with the homelessness services sector providing 5 year funding agreements as foundation for longer term program planning, quality assurance, investment and place based delivery models. Final analysis of the Action Plan 2017-2020 should be able to provide more evidence on effectiveness and outcomes of these new arrangements.
- The design of the *Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Action Plan 2019-2023* involved extensive consultation with local communities, peak bodies and departmental staff (e.g. over 200 participants attended Yarning Circles led by Mr Mick Gooda, First Nations Advisor to the Minister for Housing and Public Works and held in: Mount Isa, Townsville, Palm Island, Ipswich, Brisbane, Cairns, Yarrabah and Cherbourg). A key action which is being progressed is the establishment of a new Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Housing Body to work with Indigenous Community Housing Organisations (ICHOs) and Indigenous councils to improve housing outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.
- DHPW won three major awards at the 2018 Good Design Awards in Sydney for the Growing Human-Centred Design across Queensland Government project which included recognition of the redesigned Fortitude Valley Housing Service Centre.
- A new suite of six flexible assistance packages (Helping Hand head-lease, Rental Security Subsidy, Rent Connect Enhancements, No Interest Loans, the Regional Discretionary Fund and Bond Loan Plus) has been developed and are being advanced/ distributed across Queensland (some, like the No Interest Loan product are limited to certain locations). One new 10-hour training program (Dollars and Sense for Successful Tenancies) has been developed and is being delivered to help people who enrol in it develop the tenancy and life skills of people in the private rental market. To date, 722 students have enrolled in it, 467 have commenced training and 404 students have graduated.

⁵ As at 30 June 2020.

3. Consumer Confidence

- Passage of the *Housing Legislation (Building Better Futures) Amendment Act 2017* (HLA Act) in October 2017 delivered Housing Strategy commitments to reform and modernise the *Manufactured Homes (Residential Parks) Act 2003*, *Residential Services (Accreditation) Act 2002* and *Retirement Villages Act 1999*.
- Reforms to manufactured (residential parks) homes legislation included a new *Manufactured Homes (Residential Parks) Regulation 2017* made in September 2017 which included prohibited unfair 'special terms' in site agreements. HLA Act amendments to the *Manufactured Homes (Residential Parks) Act 2003* that commenced in November 2017 included new behavioural standards for operators, staff and home owners. New rules for site rent increases; an improved dispute resolution process that harmonises with the process in the *Retirement Villages Act 1999*; stronger prohibitions on meter reading and administrative charges for utilities, and clearer rules around emergency and guest access commenced in October 2018. A new pre-contractual disclosure system, improved cooling-off period protections, and requirements for residential parks to have emergency plans in place commenced in September 2019.
- Amendments to the *Retirement Villages Act 1999* that commenced in November 2017 included behavioural standards for operators, staff and residents and the requirement to pay former residents their exit entitlements 18 months after departure, a protection which was later extended to include mandatory purchase after 18 months of unsold freehold units. A new staged pre-contractual disclosure process; improvements to processes for reselling and valuing a unit; better resident access to important village documents; and clearer rules for new residents about reinstatement and renovation of a unit commenced in February 2019. New processes about the closure or winding down of village; change of village operator; and redevelopment of a village started in November 2019. Targeted consultation took place in early 2019 on more standardised residence contracts and, in early and late 2019, on more standardised financial reporting. These reforms are continuing.
- To assist resident-operated retirement villages to manage their obligations under the *Retirement Villages Act 1999*, including the mandatory purchase after 18 months of unsold freehold units, the Queensland Resident-Operated Retirement Villages Support Service (QRORVSS) commenced in October 2019. QRORVSS also assists these villages with independent advice about alternative corporate structures if they do not wish to be regulated by the Act, for example, by de-registering as a retirement village and operating as a community titles scheme.
- As required by the HLA Act amendments to the *Retirement Villages Act 1999*, an independent review of the mandatory payment to former residents of their exit entitlement has commenced. The independent panel will conduct research, consult with stakeholders and provide a report to the Minister in accordance with the review's terms of reference by 30 November 2020.
- The *Residential Services (Accreditation) Act 2002* was reviewed and amendments to the came into effect in 2017 and 2018. These changes provided new protections including the requirement to report the death of any resident in residential services that provide personal care (a 'level 3' service), and a 'serious incident register' to ensure service operators manage matters effectively to protect residents.
- A significant program of community awareness, advocacy and education including working with both providers and residents is being progressed to support these legislative reforms. This program includes funding 'Right Where You Live' (Building Consumer Confidence) groups (including seniors groups and consumer groups) to promote community education and provide information to residents and potential residents of residential services (such as boarding houses), retirement villages and manufactured home owners about the legislative changes. The program is being extended to support implementation of legislative reforms to manufactured home-owners and retirement village residents after the positive feedback from 170 community information forums held with 8,200 attendees across the State as part of the initial legislative reforms.

High level findings

The Interim Analysis has found progress across all of the key actions reviewed but at differing degrees depending on the intent, scale and complexity of the action. Local contexts and policy complexity together with unforeseen external factors have, and will continue to have, impact on the implementation and outcomes of specific actions. For example the action to establish new housing and homelessness service hubs in five locations has been reconceptualised, following local engagement and co-design that found integrated services responses, rather than a focus on shared physical facilities, were more appropriate for areas with high rates of homelessness. This approach reflects the need for the Housing Strategy to continue with an agile and adaptive implementation approach, and the need to see individual actions in the context of the Strategy's ambitious vision for housing in Queensland. In this context, a rigorous assessment of progress on implementation and outcomes to date for the Action Plan 2017-2020 is necessarily limited to high level commentary, secondary data (where available) and reference to key deliverables such as the construction of a facility or dwelling, design and delivery of services and products, enactment of a piece of legislation or partnership arrangement. In particular, more granular cohort and spatial level data will be necessary to understand and assess impact and outcomes of the Action Plan and to meet the Housing Strategy's aims of investing in the right things in the right place for the people who need it most.

The relevance of the key enablers of partnerships, place based and person-centred design and delivery was evident across the three SAAs. Partnerships with local councils and communities, developers and, increasingly, the community housing sector, are critical in growing the supply of affordable and appropriate social housing; co-design and adaptive implementation approaches are critical to the service system reform agenda; and effective implementation of legislative reforms must include partnerships and engagement with stakeholder groups and a deeper understanding of the needs of consumers and residents to ensure changes to legislation and regulations address identified problems and concerns.

The interconnections between actions and across the three SAAs is evident in broad themes such as matching increased supply of diverse and affordable housing with improved person-centred tenancy management (intake, assessment and ongoing relationships) by DHPW but also in conjunction with increased access to support services for vulnerable groups such as people at risk of homelessness including young people, residents of retirement villages and manufactured homes, women leaving prison and women and children escaping domestic and family violence. Taken together these actions (and others) have ongoing relevance to the Housing Strategy.

In conclusion, the Interim Analysis of Action Plan 2017-2020 finds that the DHPW is well-positioned to advance the 10-year Housing Strategy. The following key strengths have been identified:

- *Leading practice* – history of exemplary homelessness and housing pilot initiatives which deliver positive change for clients and communities
- *Productive Partnerships* – goodwill and trust with key community and private sector leaders to support and drive system-wide reform to deliver the Housing Strategy
- *State-wide land and asset portfolio* – move to strategic engagement and precinct planning can evolve to address wider social, economic and environmental challenges through place-based responses
- DHPW manages a significant portfolio of Queensland's housing, residential land assets and housing policy and programs - there is strength in this alignment both for the DHPW's balance sheet and its state-wide reach that supports its position within Government.

Contact

This report was prepared by the University of Queensland Institute for Social Science Research with ARTD Consultants, with support from the Department of Housing and Public Works.

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For more information on the Queensland Housing Strategy, visit <https://www.hpw.qld.gov.au/about/strategy/housing> or email housingstrategy@hpw.qld.gov.au