

Why it's important

Housing is an absolute necessity for living a healthy life. Affordable, appropriate, safe and secure housing provides people with a stable base from which to participate in relationships, education, employment, social activities and recreation.


The United Nations has defined *adequate housing* as a basic human right which includes:

- legal security of tenure – the right to stay in your home
- availability – of services, materials, facilities and infrastructure for health, security, comfort and nutrition
- habitability – an environment that provides adequate space, is safe and free from harmful conditions
- accessibility – housing must be accessible particularly for those who are most disadvantaged
- location – housing must enable access to employment, health services, schools & other essential services
- cultural adequacy – housing must be constructed so as to reflect cultural identity.

People who have adequate housing are more likely to be physically, socially and mentally healthy and have a stronger sense of identity.

Those who do not have adequate housing may:

- be more likely to suffer from respiratory conditions resulting from dampness, dust and poor ventilation
- be more likely to suffer from bacterial and viral infections caused by inadequate sanitation facilities
- suffer from mental ill health as a result of trauma associated with isolation, stigma, over crowding, unsafe conditions, insecurity or social exclusion
- be at risk from dangers associated with electricity, gas, fire, sewage and structural safety issues
- seek unhealthy means of coping such as substance abuse.



*'It broke my heart to give up my little unit,
actually I wished to die,
I didn't want to keep living.'*

Age pensioner, North West Coast Tasmania

Why is housing and health an issue for Tasmanians?

Housing costs a lot

The number of Australian households with a mortgage has increased substantially over the last 20 years, as has growth in the rental market with 1 in 4 households now renting. The cost of an average home is now equivalent to 7 years of average earnings, up from 3 years in the early 1980s.¹ Average Australian household debt is 4 times what it was in 1988 and for low-income households, debt is more than 40% of their disposable income, almost doubling since 2004. Mortgage debt is highest in Tasmania, with 66% of total household debt tied to mortgages.²

The level of housing stress is high

In Tasmania, 14,600 households, almost 1/4 of those on low incomes experience housing stress (where housing costs exceed 30% of disposable income).³

Affordable rental properties are in short supply

A snapshot survey in 2015 found that only a small proportion of advertised rental properties were affordable for people who depend on Centrelink payments as their main source of income, e.g. a family with two children where the parents were looking for work would have been able to afford only 5% of the advertised properties.⁴ While rents in Tasmania are lower compared to other capital cities, so are household incomes. The average household would pay 27% of income on rent.⁵

Homelessness is here

In 2011, there were 1,579 homeless people in Tasmania.⁶

There isn't enough public housing in Tasmania

As at 30 June 2015, 2,771 Tasmanians were waiting for public housing, an increase of 26% on the previous year. In the 12 months ending 30 June 2015, the average time to house category 1 or exceptional needs applicants was 22 weeks. There were also 93 people living with disability urgently waiting for supported accommodation placement.⁷

Fuel poverty is an issue for many Tasmanians

Fuel poverty is defined as the inability to afford sufficient warmth in a home for comfort, health and quality of life.⁸ Fuel poverty, which can lead to mould growth in homes and cause respiratory problems, is common in Tasmania.

Many Tasmanian homes are not energy efficient

Space heating accounts for about 50% of energy used in Tasmanian homes, not only costing consumers financially but also contributing to climate change.⁹

References & Resources

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Communities

- Be welcoming of diverse people living in your community.
- As community groups and networks, advocate for adequate housing for all Tasmanians (write letters to politicians, become part of lobby groups, write to the media, etc).
- Hold a community forum on housing, taking a strengths-based approach to problem solving - i.e. consider the community's strengths and opportunities, and how these can be used to address housing problems.
- Establish community-based home maintenance programs, connecting with local community houses, churches, sporting or service clubs.
- Support older members of the community to stay in their own homes and *age in place*.
- Establish community gardens or share garden space.
- Hold community arts and cultural development activities to support community strengthening, and build resilience and identity.

Individuals

- If you are a tenant, learn about your right to adequate housing and, if needed, use support services such as the Tenants Union and Shelter Tasmania.
- If you are a landlord, maintain your properties to provide 'healthy housing' and, if possible, allow people to put down roots for the longer term.
- Get to know your neighbours and the people in your community.
- Establish, or become involved in good neighbour-type programs where neighbours help each other out with basic home maintenance or gardening.
- Volunteer with organisations that provide assistance to homeless people.
- Make your home more energy efficient using home energy audit tools available through your local council or Sustainable Living Tasmania.
- Advocate for adequate housing for all Tasmanians (write letters to politicians, become part of lobby groups, write to the media, etc).



Workplaces (Managers, Workers, Volunteers) & Service Providers

- Think broadly about the term 'adequate housing' by recognising the multiple factors that may trigger or be linked with housing problems - e.g. mental illness, abusive relationships, care arrangements, education, employment and poverty. Work with others to address the underlying causes of inadequate housing, and empower clients to be in charge of the solutions.
- Provide information about housing that is suitable for people with low literacy and from non-English speaking backgrounds.
- Provide appropriate housing and services for people with mobility difficulties, people living with disability and older Tasmanians so they can stay at home and do not have to enter supported living accommodation.
- Provide life skills training for young people in areas such as budgeting, cooking, gardening and home maintenance.
- If you are delegated under the Public Health Act 1997, apply a broad understanding of the term 'unhealthy premises' and work collaboratively with social services.
- Explore different housing models such as co-housing : a community of private homes clustered around shared space.
- Recognise transition periods in people's lives and how these may affect housing needs - e.g. leaving school, having children, leaving the paid workforce or becoming a carer.
- Consider the needs and circumstances of different groups - e.g. those with disabilities or those with extended families migrating from other countries.
- Use tools and resources that can help you understand the health effects of urban development policies, plans and proposals - e.g. the *Healthy Urban Development Checklist* developed by NSW Health: health.nsw.gov.au/urbanhealth/Pages/healthy-urban-dev-check.aspx.

Politicians & Governments

- Ensure that **all Tasmanians** have access to adequate housing including those who are experiencing particular difficulties such as young people in out-of-home care, people with disabilities and mobility issues, people with addictions, people coming out of prison, refugees, and those with mental illness.
- Provide adequate and appropriate public housing to meet the needs of Tasmanians.
- Consult with communities in a meaningful way about housing issues, community needs, and proposed development and re-development.
- Adequately resource public housing, address energy efficiency in housing, and provide public housing in areas that have access to services and amenities.
- Fund community arts programs in public housing to help grow the cultural identity of the community and provide tenancy support. For more information visit: publicartpublichousing.com.au/index.html.
- Increase resourcing for emergency accommodation.
- Provide adequate funding for tenancy support services.
- Lead and support involvement in the World Health Organisation's *Healthy Cities, Villages, Islands, Communities Movement*: who.int/healthpromotion/conferences/previous/jakarta/statements/healthy_cities/en/.
- Ensure land use planning and development takes into consideration access to services and amenities, and the needs of young people as well as the ageing population into the future.